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FOUR SCEPTICAL TROPOI

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Four Sceptical Tropoi, submitted by Sean O'Connell in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The interest and attention which was accorded the Sceptics of Greece, during the nineteenth century in Europe, has dwindled. My contention is that this ought not to be the case; the Greek Sceptics said much which is relevant today, and which must receive its due consideration from contemporary philosophers, because the claims and insights of ancient Scepticism are of a very basic character.

We are invited by the Sceptics to review our positions; I have chosen to deal with what I believe to be the most inviting of their invitations. This essay will focus on four areas of Sceptical concern: 1) the problems to which Sceptical questions concerning criteria give rise (Chapter 3); 2) problems introduced by the argument of perceptual relativity (Chapter 4); 3) considerations concerning the infinite regress argument (Chapter 5); and 4) considerations concerning the use of circular reasoning in argument (Chapter 6).

A very brief historical outline will introduce the four major chapters which follow, and some tentative, general remarks on Scepticism as a philosophy will conclude the essay. Throughout, it will hopefully become

apparent that the Sceptics of Greece bequeathed some philosophical tools which are relevant and effective in our own time in discussion and argument.

The most important part of the essay will be Chapters Two through Six. Chapters Three, Five and Six contain the most original and independent work in the essay; the two last-mentioned are each constructed from five or six lines of ancient text.

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INTRODUCTION: Historical Outlines

The work which suggested this present essay, and the work around which most of this essay will center, is the Pyrrhoneioi Hypotyposeis¹ (The Outlines of Pyrrhonism), which appeared in Rome sometime around the beginning of the third century A.D. under the authorship of Sextus Empiricus². These outlines, together with two other extant works by Empiricus, furnish the only documents now available which originated from within the Sceptical school of philosophy in antiquity.

Concerning these texts there is a paucity of detail. Although research into questions about dates, places, historical derivations, and so on, might yield happy results, I shall nonetheless forgo them. I shall not be concerned to deal with these texts by relating them to antecedent, contemporaneous and subsequent intellectual

¹ All Greek terms are transliterated directly from Greek sources. The procedure will be, throughout the text, that of transliterating key words and then inserting their English equivalent into brackets.

² The dates, places of residence, and even the identity of Empiricus are still matters of dispute. Cf. Patrick, M.M., The Greek Sceptics, New York, Columbia University Press, 1929, reprinted by University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1965. Cf. also, Appendix, Pp. 169a of this essay.

developments, by showing wherefrom they derived and whereto they led. The interest of this essay is more philosophical and speculative than scholarly and historical. My purpose is to systematize, clarify and evaluate four arguments discoverable in the work of Empiricus, in order to establish and sustain a Sceptical position. In doing this, I hope to provide some material which I believe to be highly relevant to some present philosophical concerns, especially within epistemology and logic. These arguments must be broadcast and heard; every philosophical position must answer to some, and perhaps all of them.

Some preparatory historical outline, however, will perhaps enlist some sympathy for the arguments which follow. This point of departure for the essay will provide an intellectual map, so to speak, onto which specific positions can be super-imposed. More important, the outline will provide a basic understanding of the philosophical and psychological posture assumed by the Sceptic. One does not completely understand a philosophy unless one is aware of the soil and climate in which it germinated and grew.

A cursory survey of the history of Greek Scepticism will reveal two strains of Sceptical thought running through the entire post-Socratic period. Both movements are the distinguishable offspring of a common parentage, each going its own way for about two hundred years, only to become almost indistinguishable from the other just prior to the emergence of Christianity. The two movements, which nonetheless are doctrinally close enough to be put under the general rubric of Scepticism, can be differentiated according to their initial concerns. From the outset, on the one hand we discern a small group of Sceptical philosophers devoted to the development of a system of principles, the adherence to which would allegedly result in psychological well-being. Their concerns were almost exclusively eudaemonistic. On the other hand, we can discern a much larger group of Sceptics which emerged a short time later and which adopted some of the procedural and theoretical principles of its immediate Sceptical precursors, and then deployed these principles in opposition to Stoic, and sometimes Epicurean logic. Their differentiation from the eudaemonistic Sceptics is to be found, then, in their greater concern for logic, which at that time included what we now call epistemology, as opposed to what we now call ethics.

The eudaemonists are generally referred to as Pyrrhonists, due to their relationship to Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 365 - 275 B.C.), while the logicians are called Academics, due to their membership in the Platonic Academy after the death of Crates (fl. 326 B.C.). Pyrrhonism was the inspiration for the Scepticism of the Academy and, to speak in a very general historical way, when Pyrrhonism entered the Academy and became transformed at the hands of its members, what was left of it outside the Academy became insignificant as a philosophical movement for close to two hundred and fifty years, until it was wedded back to the Academic stream by Aenesidemus of Crete in the middle of the first century B.C. Pyrrhonism also enjoyed a brief but fairly powerful influence on a number of medical writers in Alexandria during the first century B.C. Finally, with Sextus Empiricus the influence of Pyrrhonism is in slightly greater evidence than is Academic Scepticism, although both are clearly there.

The teachings of Pyrrho can be summed up neatly by reference to the three questions which he often repeated to his followers. First, it is to be asked, "What is the origin and nature of things?". Having answered this, we then go on to inquire "What should be our attitude toward

things?", and then, "What would be the result of this attitude?".

Pyrrho avers that with regard to the first of these questions, we simply do not have knowledge. His conclusion concerning the non-attainability of knowledge of this sort was probably drawn from two different sets of observations. The first was the obvious discrepancy in the answers provided in response to the question by any two philosophers of the time. The second was an awareness on Pyrrho's part of the limitations inherent in our reasoning and perceptual faculties. Pyrrho asserted that if sense and reason were deceptive singly, then their reliability is no better in combination, an assertion that shows a reliance on earlier Megaric and Protagorean relativism, with which he was familiar.

Because he thought knowledge regarding the ultimate origin and nature of things to be unattainable, it was clear to Pyrrho what the answer to the second question ought to have been: concerning all claims to knowledge, suspend judgement. We must neither cling to nor reject outright any of the proposed answers to questions about the reality of things; instead we must engage in epoche ("no judgement" or "suspense of judgement"). This word later

became part of the standard terminology in both Pyrrhonian and Academic Scepticism, and along with one other word it captures the essence of the whole Pyrrhonian position.

The other word provides the answer to the third of the three questions asked above. Ataraxia ("tranquillity of mind") follows upon the suspension of judgement concerning the nature of reality; it is the result of withholding either assent to or dissent from theories about the real and ultimate nature of things.

The two formulations, epoche and ataraxia, together express the full meaning of Pyrrhonism, and this being so it can be seen that as a movement in philosophy it aims less at the development of a consistent system of reasoned principles than at a state of mind or at a mental attitude toward the world. de Vogel divides the Sceptical period into three phases, the first of which is termed the period of the older Sceptics, notably Pyrrho and his successor Timon, and which is said to be a period of an "anti-dialectical philosophy of life"³. Pyrrho spoke of his teachings as comprising an agoge ("way of life"), the practice of which would lead to mental repose.

³ de Vogel, C.J., Greek Philosophy, A Collection of Texts, Volume III, Leiden, 1959, Pp. 186

Diogenes Laertius quotes Posidonius as having related a story about Pyrrho which makes clear what the Sceptic's outlook was to have been. When Pyrrho and some other travellers were on a ship in a raging storm and many of those on board became unnerved by the wind and high waves, Pyrrho remained calm, pointing to a little pig on the ship's deck which quietly went on eating and explaining that such was the unperturbed state in which the wise man would remain.⁴ This ataraxic unperturbedness, along with the conditions of aphasia ("silence") and adiaphoria ("indifference") expresses the state of mind which is the natural result, according to Pyrrho, of an agoge which employs epoche as its only procedural tool.

His Scepticism, then, was taught by him for eudaemonistic reasons; it was an attempt by him to formulate a set of principles for the achievement of contentment, and nothing more. In fact, it is stated by Theodosius in his Sceptic Chapters that a Pyrrhonist ought not really to be identified with Scepticism, but rather he should be one who does no more than imitate and resemble Pyrrho in life and manners.

⁴ Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, ix, 68 - 69; translated by R.D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, London, 1959.

Timon of Phlius (325/15 - 230/20 B.C.) was Pyrrho's disciple and the prophet of Pyrrhonism, having been a prolific writer and a public lecturer. His teachings are almost stereotypic of Pyrrho's, with slightly less emphasis on the theoretical concept of epoche and slightly more attention to the practical and psychological concept of adiaphoria.

The teachings of Pyrrho and Timon found their way into the Platonic Academy under the presidency of Arcesilaus of Pitane (315 - 241 B.C.) where they were given a systematic treatment and logical refinement for the purposes of dialectic. The introduction of Pyrrhonism into the Academy marks the commencement of Academic Scepticism, which emphasized that ataraxia is not the end of an epochological philosophy, rather, it is just a happy accident or symptom of the suspensive state. The interest of Academic Scepticism is directed wholly towards epistemology and logic, and not ethics or mental health.

Three important aspects of the thought of Arcesilaus can be isolated for treatment here. The first two, taken together, deny the possibility of there being any knowledge at all, while the third provides a guideline for living without this knowledge.

Knowledge from rational argument he held to be

impossible, for the reason that to every argument asserting the truth of X, another argument of equal plausibility and conviction can be opposed, asserting the truth of non-X. Diogenes Laertius points out that Arcesilaus was the first to suspend judgement concerning all claims to rational knowledge owing to the "contradictions of opposing arguments" as well as being the first Academic to "argue on both sides of a question".⁵

Knowledge from sensation he held to be impossible, and he claimed to have shown this in his then-famous arguments directed against the Stoic doctrine of phantasia kataleptike ("self-evident and irresistable impressions or ideas"). The Stoics believed that a cataleptic representation carried with it its own truth. This is a formulation of a criterion of self-evidence. Arcesilaus replied to this position in two ways, by pointing out that in the first place we often find false impressions to be irresistable and mistakenly assent to them as self-evidently true. Secondly, a perception, he argued, is never either true or false in itself. It is in producing judgements about perceptions that truth-functional claims, as we now call them, are made. However, we have no criterion for judging the rightness or wrongness

⁵ Diogenes Laertius, op. cit., iv, 28-29.

of the judgement, and therefore there is no self-evident perception or idea. What is said to count as knowledge, as far as Arcesilaus is concerned, is nothing more than opinion.

If, as the philosophers of the Middle Academy hold, there is no other avenue to belief other than sense perception and reason, if these two faculties are the only points of transaction between the mind and whatever is outside it, then knowledge of what is real is clearly impossible and judgement must be suspended concerning the nature of "reality". Arcesilaus was aware, however, that one could not pass through life without failing to assent to or dissent from some things for practical and psychological reasons. The guide for practical and ethical action he called the eulogon ("reasonable"). Reason, although it could never attain to undisputable and thoroughly demonstrable conclusions is not, on that account, to be rendered entirely impotent and functionless. By making use of the contents of memory, for example, reason is able to construct beliefs which are more probably true than some others. What is more probably true is the eulogon, although it must be pointed out here that the sense of 'probably' is not that of 'statistical likelihood' or 'inductive predictability'. The concept of eulogon might

be better explained as 'that which appeals (to reason)'. The use of the word in this sense, as one writer has pointed out, commits Arcesilaus to a positive system of ethics, but not to a positive theory of knowledge.⁶

The famous doctrine of probability, in a sense relevant to contemporary philosophy of science, first appeared in the Academy around one hundred years later, with Carneades (214 - 129 B.C.), who uses the word pithanon instead of eulogon to indicate the meaning of the concept of probability.⁷ Eulogon seems to be a term which is more appropriately applied to personal experience; when we regulate belief according to the eulogon we simply make note of the intensity of conviction or feeling we possess. The eulogon is a subjective psychological principle, with no external reference. The concept of pithanon, on the other hand, introduces an element of objectivity: our feeling must have reference to the external world, even though we do not know what it is really like. Empiricus emphasizes that, for Carneades, "The presentation...is a presentation of something---of that, for instance, from

⁶ Patrick, M.M., The Greek Sceptics, op. cit., Pp. 114.

⁷ *ibid*, Pp. 118.

which it comes and of that in which it occurs...and, such being its nature, it will have two aspects, one in its relation to the object presented, the second in its relation to the subject experiencing the presentation".⁸

Pithanon is a more theoretical construct which compounds degrees of conviction with actual existence: "The pithanon, or the probable, then, stands for reality in our relation to life. It does not, however, stand for knowledge."⁹ Arcesilaus had left the question of knowledge and opinion entirely outside the principle of the eulogon, while Carneades includes it in the principle of the pithanon.

The probable is a continuum of many different degrees, but for the sake of economy Carneades developed three broad categories of probability. He called them: 1) the probable in itself, 2) the probable and undisputed, and 3) the probable, undisputed and tested. The first category is that of the least probability, belonging to single ideas or perceptions, while the second category is that of an intermediate probability belonging to a perception or idea which can be united with another perception or idea without

⁸ Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Mathematicos, translated by R.D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, London, 1961, vii, 167 - 168.

⁹ Patrick, M.M., The Greek Sceptics, op. cit., Pp. 159.

contradiction, and the third category represents the highest degree of probability, which is reached when a system of ideas and/or perceptions can be formed, each consistent with all the others. The last and highest degree of probability could be termed 'practical certitude'.

Carneades repeats Arcesilaus' arguments against the Stoic doctrine of phantasia kataleptike, saying that there is nothing by virtue of which we can distinguish the true from the false. However, he stated his argument in terms slightly different from those of Arcesilaus and in so doing provided later Sceptics with a formula which could be used against more generalized claims to knowledge. Carneades demanded a kriterion ("criterion") as a means of distinguishing the true from the false presentation, a requirement which later could be extended against other philosophical positions. In addition, he added two arguments of his own which he thought would destroy the Stoic's "self-evidence" criterion. Firstly, he argues that it is plainly impossible to have a kataleptic perception of quality, whether primary or secondary, because qualities are always changing with the position, disposition, and a host of other circumstances in the perceiving subject, and we do not know into which of these many circumstances we ought to put ourselves in order to achieve cataleptic perception. There is no more (or less)

self-evidence in the perceptions given in one set of circumstances than in those given in any other. Carneades also asks of the Stoic Chrysippus, who admitted that there are doubtful cases of cataleptic perception, how it is possible to isolate a point of transaction from a cataleptic perception to a non-cataleptic one, or vice versa. In brief, the answer which Carneades provides for his own question has it that because no point at which the transition occurs can be isolated, it then follows that there is virtually no difference between them.

Carneades also brings to bear some other arguments against the Stoic logic, which were later to serve as fortifications for the Sceptical position. Cicero relates¹⁰ that he attacked the fundamental axiom of Stoic logic, namely the Law of Contradiction, thereby overthrowing their entire logical system, and, as well, that he outlined certain requirements which had to be met before an argument could be said to "prove" something, and then went on to prevent these requirements from ever being met, thus making "proof" impossible.

After the death of Carneades, Scepticism in the Academy became moribund until finally, under the Presidency of

¹⁰ Cicero, Academica, 11, 95.

Antiochus (128-68 B.C.) it dies out there forever. This, however, did not mark the end of Scepticism as a philosophical position. The combined influences of Philo of Larissa (140-77 B.C.), the first president of the Fourth Academy, and a refurbished Pyrrhonism which emerged in Alexandria toward the end of the second century B.C., came together in two figures who have been subsequently labelled as Dialectical Sceptics: Aenesidemus of Crete (fl. 50 B.C.) and Agrippa (fl. 50 A.D.).

Aenesidemus argued against positions which pretended to comprehend and elucidate "truth" and which claimed to be able to provide "proof" for their claims. A more specific account of these arguments will be the responsibility of a later section of this essay. He also made explicit one of the classical arguments of Scepticism which says, roughly, that there is no claim to knowledge which does not assume something, the assumption being either undemonstrable, in which case there is no knowledge, or demonstrable, in which case another assumption must be made in order to show that the first assumption can be justified and that it is a piece of knowledge. Now a vicious regress has begun. This argument will, as well, receive more attention presently.

Aenesidemus has provided another concept which will turn out to be central to the development of the main part

of this paper, that subsequent philosophy cannot in all good faith ignore. The concept is that of the tropos ("argument", "position", "mode"). The tropos, or what we shall call the Trope, was a dialectical tool employed for the purpose of reaching suspension of judgement concerning claims to knowledge.

Aenesidemus provides two different sets of tropes, the first set being eight in number and directed against claims to knowledge of causes, accordingly termed the eight Aetiological Tropes, and a second set of ten which are concerned with the difficulties in perception. These two sets of tropes express the principles of later Pyrrhonism systematized and arranged, and are said by Empiricus to encompass all alleged knowledge. The eight Aetiological Tropes together provide one of the strongest arguments against the possibility of knowledge, by saying that phenomena can give us no knowledge of "reality".

Agrippa reduced the number of tropes from ten to five, however his tropes are written from an entirely different point of view, more concerned to erect epistemological barriers against potential claims to knowledge than to introduce doubt concerning certain established claims. His tropes are formalizations, in effect, which aim to demonstrate the logical impossibility of justifying all

traditional truth-functional assertions.

A later Pyrrhonist (unknown, cf. R.G. Bury's introduction to the Hypotyposeon, op. cit., Pp. xli) introduced two more very generalized tropes, written in the same tenor and with the same design as those of Agrippa. He attempted to show that if nothing could be proven either through its inherent qualities or through other non-inherent qualities, then knowledge is impossible.

After the death of Agrippa, there is only one figure of any consequence in the history of Greek Sceptical philosophy, and that is Sextus Empiricus (fl. 175-200 A.D.). His importance lies largely in the fact that he is the only Greek Sceptic whose written work has not been lost or destroyed, and, in addition to this, his extant works provide us with a fairly complete history of the thought of his predecessors. He does, however, add a few decidedly significant arguments of his own in support of the Sceptical positions which he accepts.

Those of his works which have been preserved to modern times are: Outlines of Pyrrhonism (in three books); Against the Mathematicians (with six divisions); Against the Dogmatists (with five divisions). The Outlines of Pyrrhonism and divisions one and two of Against the Dogmatists will occupy most of our attention throughout this essay. It is

here that we find a number of arguments, some quite general and others quite detailed, which, if sound, weigh heavily against many positions formerly and presently adopted by philosophers. My aim is to organize, expound and evaluate these arguments and, in so doing, lend some support to the views of Classical Scepticism.

#2. TROPOLOGY

We have previously mentioned the tropos in our discussions concerning the Scepticism of Aenesidemus, but failed at that time to provide an adequate definition for the term. A trope, otherwise called a 'position', 'argument' or 'mode' by the older Sceptics¹¹, was regarded by most of the Greek Sceptics as a methodological instrument, employed for the purpose of performing the epoche, and thereby winning ataraxia. Empiricus outlines a number of tropes contending all the while that they are arguments leading to suspense of judgement, and for him the whole point of suspending judgement is to achieve contentment and unperturbedness.

The trope is therefore defined by Empiricus in terms of an end, that of mental quietude, but this line of definition cannot be followed here, owing to the fact that in relating epistemological difficulties to withholding of assent and the subsequent achievement of contentment we would be creating a wrong or at least highly dubitable psychology.

¹¹ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., 1, 36.

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THE CITY OF BOSTON, FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME. BY SAMUEL JOHNSON, ESQ. OF THE BARR, AT THE LAW. IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I. LONDON, PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD, 1790.

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Current philosophical interests would best be served by isolating the tropes themselves and then treat them solely as important difficulties which confront any theory of knowledge and some points of logic. What we need to do now, then, is to impart another, but equally faithful, meaning to the concept of 'trope' and then go on to outline some tropes which emerge from the work of Empiricus.

In so doing, I shall be conforming to another underlying aim of this essay, namely, to show that there have been things said in antiquity which are not necessarily antiquated. Too often it is thought that because an idea is old it is for that reason nothing more than a historical curio, very likely to be wrong, and almost certain to be irrelevant.

If we eliminate the notions of epoche and ataraxia, there is still something valuable left over in the concept of the trope. This "something valuable" will, as might be expected, provide us with a working definition.

What the Sceptics were doing when they employed the trope was, minimally, introducing objections to certain sorts of philosophical claims, which at that time were

likely to be the claims of Stoicism.¹² What value this has will be pointed out soon. The point is, however, that a trope sets up opposition to some claims which might have otherwise have gone without criticism. This opposition may be of many kinds, but to speak in very general terms it may be either prophylactic---in that it aims at preventing some kinds of claims to knowledge or belief from ever being formulated---or it may be abortifacient---in that it aims at the destruction of some claims which after being formulated are found to be defective in one way or another. From this emerges a satisfactory definition: a trope is a set of propositions or questions which allows for the raising of objections to any given claim to knowledge or belief, through the provision of grounds for doubt regarding that claim.

The fact that a trope provides for the raising of objections to all sorts of knowledge claims makes it valuable in a number of ways. In the first place, given a sufficient number of tropes, each with its own region and manner of opposition, there is no claim to knowledge which does not go unchallenged. This, at least, has the merit of allowing for the elimination or

¹² Zeller, E., Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, Russell & Russell, New York, 1962, Pp. 538.

prevention of falsity. The tropes themselves are non-specific, but they have the virtue of being able to show either the impossibility or the implausibility of specific claims. Claims, and the justifications for those claims, fall into clusters or types. A trope, because it opposes a certain general type of claim, or justification, therefore opposes the specific claims which are members of that type or cluster.

In the second place, the tropes are the point of departure for discussion and argument and demonstration, without which resolution of conflict is impossible. Of course, there are many such points of departure, but most lack a generalized and systematic character, which the trope possesses.

If we consider the entire range of tropes (or even only those with which we shall be dealing), it will be seen that they have the merit of encouraging discourse commonly thought to be worthwhile, while eliminating other unworthwhile candidates for discourse and debate. For example, if the empirical statement 'All cows eat grass' is opposed with the statement 'All cows do not eat grass' (one of Arcesilaus' tropes is that of opposition by simple contradiction), then the champions of both statements must immediately engage in some

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discourse, whether it be defining terms, presenting evidence, or whatever, in order to vindicate their respective claims. On the other hand, other sorts of discourse cannot arise. For example, the claims of mysticism are of such a type that they cannot be argued for. The trope mentioned above can be used again in this example. For every mystical claim that is made, such as "Reason is a natural life whose ground lies in a temporal beginning and end, and cannot enter into the supernatural ground wherein God is understood"¹³, there is an opposing claim which contradicts the original. Therefore, the professed mystic, knowing that his knowledge claim (in this case, the claim that God is unknowable by reason and that the knowledge of Him is unutterable) can be opposed by a contradictory claim, and knowing further that he is claiming to non-discursive knowledge, cannot SAY anything. We are, by the trope, forced to say and justify what we think can be said and justified, and we are prevented from attempting to say and justify what we say is unsayable and unjustifiable.

¹³ Boehme, Jacob, Six Theosophic Points, translated by John Earle, University of Michigan Press, 1958, Pp. 165.

In the third place, the tropes are effective in exposing some knowledge claims as nothing more than dogma or superstition. If, as most philosophers admit, dogma and superstition are bad things, then the tropes of antiquity are again invested with some value.

These undeveloped remarks, however, are extremely generalized. Each trope has its own direction, and therefore its own values. These should emerge in the discussions which follow shortly.

Some tropes make explicit the difficulties which are inherent in certain positions, others oppose the formulation of some claims by constructing reasonable requirements which must be met before the claim can be intelligible or consistent. Very often, however, the strength of a trope will be dependent upon the strength of a criteriological demand to which it will probably reduce. Therefore the very general criteriological position of the Sceptics must be examined and established before any of the more specific tropes can find their grounding.

We must have some trepidation in calling the criteriological position a trope. It is never said to be so by any of the Sceptics, although it is clearly tropological in character. In recalling the position to mind in

our reasonings and discussions, we can bring objections and difficulties to light which may not have otherwise appeared, often very basic difficulties. Insofar as we can resort to this position, and make use of it as a methodological tool, it is tropological. Its employment is another manner of demanding reasons of conclusions which are advanced in argument.

We shall, however, give the name 'Trope' to the position with the following reservation: the criteriological position has the full character of a trope, and can be systematically employed as such, but nowhere in the history of Greek Scepticism has it ever been designated as such.

#3. TROPE ONE: THE CRITERION

In one sense, the Sceptics accept that there is a criterion, but in another more important sense they deny it. In one sense, which does not presently interest us greatly, they admit that there must be some guideline for living and acting. This is a four-fold practical criterion for getting happily through life, one part of it being the regulation of living according to the dictates of Nature, another in the constraint of passion, another following the laws and customs of the place in which one resides, and the last being instruction in the arts and taking an interest in what we now call "cultural objects". This practical criterion is accepted as valid by Empiricus, and it denotes the "standard of action by conforming to which in the conduct of life we perform some actions and abstain from others".¹⁴

The kind of criterion which is of more interest to problems of knowledge and belief is the one which we could call the epistemic criterion, which Empiricus

¹⁴ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, I, 21.

describes as being "the standard regulating belief in reality or unreality".¹⁵ In other words, an epistemic criterion would be that by virtue of which we declare ourselves to believe or know something. When asked for the ultimate reasons for claiming either to know something or to believe something to be true, our response would likely be a poorly articulated criterion. It would be what we resort to in the formation of knowledge and belief propositions, that in which our knowledge or belief is said to be grounded. This notion of the criterion, conforming to the early etymological derivation of the word, points up the meaning which we now wish to impart to it.

'Criterion' originally derives from 'krino', a Greek word designating the physical action of 'separating' or 'distinguishing', as when the black goats are separated from the white ones, or when the wheat is separated from the chaff. Later the meaning was extended to include the mental actions which underlay the physical actions, so that the notions of 'decision-making' and disputing were indicated by it. Distinguishing, decision-making and disputing are kinds of judgement, thus 'krino' soon

¹⁵ *ibid*, I, 21.

came to be used as the verb which describes the mental action of judging, out of which naturally arose the noun 'kriterion', which seems to have been used philosophically for the first time by Plato. He gave it a two-fold sense; firstly, it was used in the philosophical sense of 'means for judging or trying (the mental faculties or the senses)', and secondly in the literal sense of 'court of judgement' or 'tribunal'. Both nuances adequately indicate the meaning at which we are attempting to get now.

An epistemic criterion would be a standard to which knowledge or belief claims would be referred in order to determine their truth or falsity. It would be the means for evaluating the validity of judgements. If X judges or claims Y, then there must be something by virtue of which Y is established as being the case or not being the case. The 'something by virtue of which' would be the criterion, that to which we appeal.

Suppose there is a conflict in the claims as to who won the race. A judges himself to have won and B judges himself to have won. But there has been a prior agreement by the participants in the race that a photograph, taken at the finish line, will arbitrate the

winner. A sees that B is touching the wire in the photograph, but A himself is not touching, and then agrees that he lost the race. This situation pictures for us the meaning which is now being imparted to the word 'criterion'. The criterion, in this case the photograph, is the final arbiter in deciding whose claim to have won the race was the right one. It is the final 'court of judgement'.

Epistemic criteria seem to vary; in some places and times the criterion for deciding the rightness or wrongness of knowledge claims is different from other times and places. Different philosophers make different criteriological demands. A number of Stoics believed that numbers alone are to arbitrate conflicting belief and knowledge claims: they thought, for example, that the argument from consensus gentium proved the existence of God.¹⁶ Thus, if any knowledge claim is submitted for evaluation then according to them we must determine how widely the claim is held to be true and on that basis decide whether or not it is true. The criterion employed in this instance is one of numbers.

Many mystical religions, on the other hand, employ

¹⁶ Zeller, Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics, op. cit., Pp. 543.

a criterion which allows for a minority claim to be judged as true over and against a majority claim. This is so because their epistemic criterion is an experiential one, and it believed by them that few ever have experiences of the order which the criterion demands. The state to which the Zen Buddhist attains in the Satori experience, for example, is judged to be knowledge-giving only if it is, among other things, irrational, intuitively apprehended, authoritative, affirming, impersonal, exalted and transitory.¹⁷ If one or more of these characteristics does not form part of the Satori experience, then the knowledge to which Zen aspires is not present.

Another criterion for knowledge was formulated by Descartes: "...it seems to me that I may now take as a general rule, that all that is very clearly and distinctly apprehended (conceived) is true".¹⁸ This criterion is roughly the same as the criterion of phantasia kataleptike used by Zeno of Citium.¹⁹

¹⁷ Suzuki, D., The Essentials of Zen Buddhism, Dutton, New York, 1962, Pp. 163 - 168.

¹⁸ Descartes, Meditations on the First Philosophy, trans. John Veitch, LaSalle Illinois, 1962, Pp. 43.

¹⁹ Cicero, Academica 11, xlvii seq.

The similarity between these two criteria consists in the fact that both rely on the notion of "self-evidence". There is nothing, according to Descartes and Zeno, which lies outside a true presentation to the mind; we just KNOW when the criterion for knowledge is being met.

In addition to the criteria of consensus, special experience and self-evidence, there are others. In mathematical and logical operations there are a number of criteria which must be met before we can say that we have mathematical knowledge. These sorts of criteria, which are decided upon by common agreement, we could term 'stipulative criteria'.

Other criteria have been produced throughout the history of philosophy, each with its advocants and disputants. The "choerence" criterion has it that we cannot be said to know anything until each of our claims, observations and experiences cohere with all other claims and observations, and are found to exhibit an overall consistency. One of the most repeated criteria is that of "correspondence": It requires that our ideas in all ways correspond with whatever gave rise to them before knowledge can be present. The list of epistemic criteria could be made even longer.²⁰

²⁰ For a more exhaustive outline of epistemic criteria, cf. Sahakian & Sahakian, Ideas of the Great Philosophers, Barnes and Noble, New York, 1966, Pp. 3-10.

However, the point has been made, namely that there is a great variety in the alleged criteria which have been put forth by different philosophers.

What we are now calling the criteriological trope, probably first made explicit by Carneades²¹, makes it impossible that there is a knowable criterion for knowledge. Some of the arguments of Empiricus, which seem to be original, are natural candidates for discussion here. Also the trope can be reinforced by a discussion of Empiricus' remarks on self-evidence. Therefore, the trope will have the following aspects: a generalized aspect which purports to prevent the final acceptance of any epistemic criterion; a more specific aspect which entails an examination of three candidates which could be thought to be used as arbiters for all knowledge claims; and another aspect entailing an examination of the notion of self-evidence. The last aspect will be imbedded in the discussions of the first two.

²¹ Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Mathematicos, VII, 166-68.

1.

(a) Does a criterion for knowledge and belief exist? This question is either capable of decision or it is not. If it is not, then we cannot either assert the existence of a criterion, nor can we deny it. Therefore we cannot assert its existence. If the question is capable of decision, then something must be known in order that this decision can be made. But we cannot say that we know anything because we have not yet found a criterion for knowing. If we cannot presuppose what is being questioned, then we can neither assert nor deny the existence of a criterion, and therefore we cannot assert it.

(b) Furthermore, if there are opposing, or at least disparate, claims as to what is the correct criterion for knowledge, then any resolution of the dispute is impossible because a third criterion will have to be introduced to arbitrate the dispute, but this third criterion itself becomes, immediately upon introduction, a part of the dispute along with the original claims. "...in order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion, we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the

criterion must first be decided,"²² The discovery of a criterion becomes impossible, because for every one which is introduced as the final "court of judgement" there is just one more which requires consideration as a candidate. On the other hand, the regressing series will terminate only if it is admitted that a criterion does not exist. That is to say, sooner or later an assumption could be made, but an assumption does not meet the demands which a criterion makes, and no knowledge is ever grounded in assumption. "...the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow (the adoption of) a criterion by assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to a regress ad infinitum."²³

(c) And furthermore, if there is a criterion for knowledge and belief it must be shown that there is, because if it is not shown then the door is left open to many different claims, some of which may be either ridiculous or false. But something must be accepted as being known before the demonstration can be carried out,

²² Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, 11, 20.

²³ *ibid*, 11, 20-21.

that is, demonstration requires a criterion. Also, the criterion requires a demonstration, which is to say that in order to show that something is known, something must first be known which can be taken as a point of departure for the demonstration that something can be known. But, with the question "Can anything be known?" the point of departure for demonstration is itself part of the question. To assume or stipulate such a point of departure would perhaps make a demonstration easy, airtight and appealing, but we still cannot be said to know anything. Thus, any attempt to show that there is a criterion would be a process of circular reasoning.

These three arguments taken together provide general grounds for rejecting any proposed criterion for knowledge. The most important truth which emerges from a consideration of their content is that it is impossible to prove or know that one criterion which is proposed is better or worse than any other. The impossibility is a logical one: our justifications and reasons for claiming something will themselves either remain unjustified, in which case they can be truthfully said to be no more than assumptions, or we will attempt to justify

them, in which case the whole problem has simply been set back a step, because our justifications and reasons for the initial justifications and reasons must themselves be justified. If they are not then they, too, are no more than guesses, assumptions, or, as is often the case, wish fulfilments.

2.

Empiricus isolates three kinds of criteria which he thinks could be used as arbiters for different knowledge claims, and which he believes will cover every kind of knowledge claim. If it is true that these criteria cover every alleged knowledge proposition, and further that if none of these criteria are valid, then it follows that no claim to knowledge can be validated; this entails that we can never know that we know, which makes us feel that we ought never to SAY that we know.

The three criteria he describes as follows: the criterion "by whom" (agent), the criterion "by means of which" (instrument), and the criterion "according to which" (application). He attempts to make his meaning clearer by means of an example:

"For just as in the process of examining heavy and light objects there are three criteria, the man who weighs, the scales and the act of weighing, and of these the weigher is the criterion of the agent, the scales that of the instrument, and the act of weighing that of the use; and again, just as for the determination of the things straight and crooked there is the need of a craftsman and a rule and the application of the rule; so, in the same way, in philosophy also, for the determination of things true and false, we require the three criteria we have mentioned above".*

(a) It seems impossible, argues Empiricus, to decide what 'agency' would be the criterion for truth and knowledge. Can man be the criterion of knowledge? But what is man? Empiricus cites replies to this question by Democritus, Socrates, and Epicurus to show how varied and incommensurate with each other the answers have been. Man, he concludes, is inapprehensible; how can that which is inapprehensible be a criterion for knowledge?

* Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Dogmaticos, I, 36-37.

But, supposing that man could be understood and known, would it still not be impossible to show that knowledge claims ought still to be judged by him? If it could be shown at all that man is the ultimate criterion of agent, then it could not be shown by a man, for this would assume what is to be proved. It could not be shown by anything else either, because there is no way of telling what that something else would be. Man cannot decide what it would be, because then then he would be setting himself up as arbiter, and the whole question is: Can he?

If it is assumed that man is the criterion, it must then be asked: Which man or group of men? Men harbor contradictory beliefs. What is to be the criterion for deciding which of these beliefs are true and which are false? It cannot be found within the class of men because it is the entire class which is under question, and it cannot be found outside it either because as history has shown this criterion will be disputed by men, interpreted by men, explained by men, and approved by men. It may be proposed, for example, that God is to be the criterion "by which". But, we ask, which (concept of) God? Christian?

Islamic? Jewish? Cree? Even given that we know which concept to employ, there still remains the great problem of knowing or comprehending the object, being or state for which the concept stands. But this large issue is peripheral to our main interest. The point is that if the criterion cannot be found within the class of men or outside it, and if the class of men and not-man exhausts everything there is, then clearly there is no criterion "by whom".

(b) What is to be the instrument of judgement when rival claims are submitted for evaluation? It seems that there are at least two possible candidates in any case which could be instruments of evaluation. The criterion "by means of which" we judge knowledge claims to be either true or false could be either an empirical one or a logical one. That is, the instrument of evaluation would be, in the one case, sense, and in the other case, intellect. If it can be shown that man is not capable of judging either by sense alone or intellect alone or both conjoined then, granted for the moment that it is true that there is no other instrumental criterion apart from these, there can be no claim to knowledge which will receive certification.

Empiricus argues in three different ways to show that the senses cannot be the instrumental criterion. In the first place, some hold that the senses have "empty" impressions, that is, what appears to the senses does not have real existence. Others assert that the objects of sense are real, while still others assert that some are real and some others are not real. How is this controversy to be settled, which it surely must be if the senses are to be accepted as the instrumental epistemic criterion? It cannot be settled by reference to the status of certain sense perceptions as opposed to others, because the entire class of sense perceptions is being put under investigation. But nor could it be settled by reference to something instrumental other than sense-perception, because we have not established another criterion by means of which, according to which we can judge sense-perceptions. The reason for this is that if we had done this, there would be no need to ask whether or not sense-perception is the epistemic criterion.

In the second place, assuming even that we know that sense-perceptions apprehend reality, it still cannot be argued that they ought to judge rival knowledge claims.

X and Y might both perceive the real object Z, but because X is slightly older, perhaps very fatigued, perhaps suffering from a fever, and so on, it should be said that X perceives Z as Z_1 while Y perceives Z as Z_0 . Suppose that, in perceiving Z, X perceives it as slightly greener, slightly oval-shaped, somewhat acidic and pleasant to the touch. Y, on the other hand, perceives it as not-so-green, circular, sweet, and a bit painful to the touch. How are we to judge which is the "correct" set of perceptions of the same "real" object, or decide which is the veridical percept? In order to answer this question we require a non-perceptual criterion. Sense cannot be the judge. But because we have, from the outset, resisted the temptation to suppose anything, we cannot provide the non-perceptual criterion which is necessitated by any attempt to reconcile disparate perceptions.

These considerations can be extended to provide a more general argument against employing the senses as a criterion. How are we to evaluate any sense-perception as knowledge-giving? Suppose, in response to this question, it is said that in order for a perception to be knowledge-

giving it must have certain characteristics. One of these characteristics might be that it persists for a given amount of time, or that it is often repeated in our experience. But the question is, how are we to know that a perception which possesses this characteristic is any more reliable as a presentation of reality than one which does not. There is no way of deciding without presupposing the validity of specific kinds of sense-perceptions. If this argument is sound, we are led to the conclusion that sense perception is not and could not be an instrumental epistemic criterion.

As far as Empiricus is concerned, the intellect fares no better. His arguments are three.

The first is weak and trifling. The statement by Gorgias that nothing exists entails that the mind does not exist, and therefore cannot be a criterion.

But, assuming that the mind both exists and can be apprehended, there is still a problem in that the nature of the mind is not known, and "...if it does not even discern itself accurately but contradicts itself about its own existence and the mode of its origin and the position in which it is placed, how can it be able to apprehend

anything else accurately?"²⁴

If the intellect were knowable, however, and it was known precisely how it were to be employed correctly in making true judgements, it would still be a matter of difficulty to decide just which intellect would do the judging. The intellect which is to do the judging cannot be chosen by another intellect, because that would presuppose that the intellect which chooses knows everything in order that it can rightly choose the intellect which is to judge all matters.

Although this argument may sound unacceptable in these terms, it does implicate something of importance. That is that it is impossible to provide arguments for any rational criterion. If we wish to refer all judgements to a "tribunal" whose members are logical rules, axioms, or postulates, that is well and good, but we can provide no unassailable reasons for doing so. If the claims are made that intellect is the epistemic criterion, and that knowledge, by virtue of this criterion, is logical or rational, we must be able to give reasons which are non-, or at least a-rational, otherwise the criterion is presupposed.

²⁴ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., II, 58-59.

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We meet obvious difficulties in attempting to use a conjoint of sense and intellect as an epistemic criterion. The perceptions of sense are often at variance with the dictates of reason and our rational beliefs are often disappointed with the perceptions of sense. But let us allow that these can be reconciled; there is another general and compelling argument which prohibits the use of a conjoint of sense and intellect as a criterion "by means of which".

Either one will judge a conjoint of the senses and intellect by the senses alone or by the intellect alone, or one will judge the senses alone by the senses and the intellect by the intellect or the senses by the intellect and the intellect by the senses. One could not judge the senses alone or the intellect alone or both together by a conjoint of both, because it is the conjoint which is the object of scrutiny. In none of these manners can it be established that the senses and the intellect together serve as the criterion of knowledge. The sense-intellect conjoint cannot be judged by the senses alone or the intellect alone due to the perplexities previously mentioned.

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The senses cannot judge the senses, nor the intellect the intellect, because such a procedure would be one wherein the thing under question is doing the questioning. And the intellect cannot be judged by the senses, or the senses by the intellect, because if the senses judge the intellect and the intellect the senses, the operation of judging in such circumstances would plainly be one of circularity. If S is required to prove or "certify" I, and I is required to prove or "certify" S, then nothing can be proved.

"Since, therefore, criteria of the one species cannot be judged by those of a like species, nor those of both the species by those of one species, nor conversely by those of an unlike species, we shall not be able to prefer intellect to intellect or sense to sense. And because of this we shall have nothing by which to judge;...".²⁵

(c) Empiricus thinks that so far it has been established that Man cannot serve as a criterion for knowledge, and neither can sense or intellect, or a con-

²⁵ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., II, 69.

joint of these last two. What about a criterion "according to which"? To clarify somewhat, this criterion is the one which was most clearly formulated and most widely adhered to by the Stoics.²⁶ If we ask, in what does the act of man's correctly employing his sense and intellect consist, then whatever answer is supplied in response will be a criterion for knowledge "according to which", or a criterion of 'application'.

It was held by certain dogmatists that in order for anything to be known by means of either the senses or the intellect there had to be what was termed a "presentation" to the "regent part" of the soul; an alteration produced in the percipient by a presentation either to the senses or to the intellect. The question is, if there is any such thing as a "presentation" at all, what is its nature?

In what emerges as a fair amount of nonsense, Empiricus tries to show that the notion of the presentation is inconceivable. With a slightly better argument, he attempts to show that even if the notion is comprehensible, nothing can be judged according to the "pre-

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Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Dogmaticos, op. cit., I, 373.

sensation". This is so because "the intellect...does not make contact with external objects and receive presentations by means of itself but by means of the senses, and the senses do not apprehend real objects but only, if at all, their own affections. So then the presentation will be that of the affection of the sense, which is different from the external reality. ...And if this affection differs from the external real object, the presentation will not be that of the external reality but of something else which is different therefrom. If, therefore, the intellect judges according to this it judges badly and not according to reality."²⁷

The argument could perhaps be stated with more felicity in the following way. Cleanthes asserts that we know something when a presentation of sense-perception causes a change of one sort or another in the "regent" or "ruling" part of the soul. The metaphor he employs to picture the sort of change which takes place is that of a seal on wax. Chrysippus says only that there is a magical alteration in the soul when it receives a true

²⁷ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., II, 72-74.

presentation. (Cf. Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, II, 70-71, footnotes ^b and ^c.) The intellect is presented with a variety of perceptions; it rejects those which are illusive and false and retains those which are veridical, on the basis of the kind of impression they make, or the alteration they catalyze, when they first meet the mind. True perceptions activate a certain kind of alteration in the intellect.

The Sceptics contra-argument sees the impossibility of ever knowing exactly which impression or alteration correlates with veridical perception, because the mind always, on the Stoic view, receives its impressions, information, or stimulus through the senses. The mind can never stand outside the filtration of presentations by the senses, which may be either illusive or veridical, in order to come to determine which presentations are true, and further, the nature of the alteration or impression in the intellect when it receives a veridical impression. The external world impinges upon consciousness through the affections of sense; the mind never comes into direct contact with the real world. The Stoics, or anyone else who proposes that veridical perceptions

induce a certain kind of "impression" or specific "feeling" in consciousness, really require someone or something with a God's eye view (a view which is itself not constructed by a mind out of the affections of sense) to give them a sign at each of their perceptions which says either "This is a veridical perception; make note of your subjective state or feeling", or, "This is not a veridical perception...". Assuming, of course, that the being which provided these signs knew what he (it) was doing, and that he was trustworthy, and further that the alteration-presentation correlates could be remembered infallibly by the percipient, then Cleanthes and Chrysippus would both know when they know.

There is also a good argument against the assertion that the soul apprehends external realities through the affections of sense, or what might now be termed 'sense-data'. Anyone who claims this must of course also assume that there is strict similarity between the affections of sense and the cause or stimulus of the affection, namely the external reality. By showing in fairly simple terms that such similarity cannot be either plausibly assumed or shown to exist, Empiricus provides an argument, which if

put into more general terms, can be used effectively against any crude correspondence theory of truth.

If we can be said to know only when there is a correspondence between the idea which we have of an external reality and the reality itself, then there must be a 'something' which guarantees that our idea does in fact correspond with the external reality. But no such guarantee is discoverable: "For just as a man who does not know Socrates but has seen a picture of him does not know whether the picture is like Socrates, so also the intellect when it gazes on the affections of the senses but does not behold the external objects will not so much as know whether the affections of the senses are similar to the external realities."²⁸

It seems to be our sad state that, if knowledge is the correspondence of the external world to the ideas we have of it, a case of knowing something can never be pointed out to us because there is no-one, including ourselves, who can see what the world is like and at the same time what sorts of ideas or perceptions we are

²⁸ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., II, 75-76.

having of the world. We are condemned to gaze upon the copy of Socrates (the "appearance") without ever seeing the original Socrates (the "reality"); we can never know the degree of fidelity the painting has to the painted. The analogy can only go so far, however; it would be necessary that we are totally unable to check and see the original Socrates. The point of the argument maintains just this: that it would never be possible to make such a check, we always have awareness only of the appearance.

Wittgenstein has said something which is of help here. We can adapt a passage from the Investigations to the above argument:

Let us imagine a table (something like a dictionary) that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X by a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is looked up only in the imagination? ---"Well, yes; then it is a subjective justification." ---But justification consists in appealing to something independent. ---"But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don't know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train right and to check it I call to mind how a page of the timetable looked. Isn't it the same here?" ---No; for this process has got to produce a memory which is actually correct. If the mental image

of the time-table could not itself be tested for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if some-one were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true.)

Looking up a table in the imagination is no more looking up a table than the image of the result of an imagined experiment is the result of an experiment.

(Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Blackwell's, Oxford, 1963, Pp. 93^e, 94^e.)

Using a mental image to check a **memory**, using one morning paper to check the truth of the contents of another morning paper, and using an appearance to reassure ourselves that another appearance resembles the reality, all amount to roughly the same thing: we are prevented by the logic of such operations from ever achieving what we set out to achieve.

Let us grant for the moment that in addition to being conceivable and apprehensible, the "presentation" also admits of objects being judged according to it. But even in making this concession to possibility, one does not thereby concede that knowledge is possible. This is so because it can fairly be asked : "Whose presentation are we to accept?". If presentations are to be the

criterion for knowledge, and if presentations differ from each other, or contradict each other, then clearly there is no way to answer this question. This being true, there is also no indisputable criterion for knowledge.

If there are two different presentations which are submitted for "certification", and if presentations are the ultimate criterion for knowledge, as had been claimed, then the certification of one or the other differing proposals must be done by means of another presentation. But then this presentation must be certified as well, and the certification must be another certification. An infinite regress has now been generated.

The upshot of the preceding discussion is that even if it is granted that one ought to judge knowledge and belief claims according to "presentation", whether we decide to accept just some presentations while distrusting others or accept them all, "...in either case the argument is overthrown, and we are forced to conclude that we ought not to adopt presentations as criteria for the judging of objects."²⁹

²⁹ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., II, 78-79.

These are Empiricus' arguments against any position which claims to possess a criterion for knowledge: there is no way of guaranteeing that the criterion which one person has chosen is better than any other; there is no way of knowing which epistemological instrument is to be employed as a criteriological tool; and there is nothing special which characterizes an impression on sense or intellect possessing veridicality. In the interests of completeness, we have included "self-evidence" criteria within the third category.

On the whole, these arguments strike me as being powerful and sound. If it is true that they are good arguments, then we might pause briefly to consider what impact they carry and wherein their value consists.

Firstly, as will become evident, they provide both support and justification for other sceptical arguments. It will be found that some of the tropes conclude by asking for a criterion by virtue of which some philosophical positions can be defended. If it is true that there are general grounds for asserting that there is no

such thing as a philosophically justified epistemic criterion, then clearly a number of these positions cannot be maintained.

Secondly, it becomes obvious that because there are no ultimate 'courts of judgement' for philosophical claims, many of our beliefs---philosophical, religious, ethical, political, and so on---are matters of personal choice. The values which we hold, the beliefs we have about moral behavior, the nature of reality and human existence, and the way we rationalize our own experience and the experience of others, all have presuppositions. The basis for choosing these presuppositions will have to be something other than alleged rational, theological, mystical or experiential knowledge. Although it is beyond the interest of this essay to say what those bases might be, there are some suggestions which immediately present themselves. For instance, we might choose some sort of pragmatic criterion for knowledge and action. We might just as well choose our presuppositions for psychological reasons: whatever is most satisfying and most likely to lead to happiness could be the standard regulating belief and action. We could also choose an empirical basis, or a

mystical one, or a phenomenological one, but the point is that whatever we choose, the decision to choose this instead of that is not a decision based on any knowledge. The choice can always be subject to the severe criticism of ourselves and others; in the end, no reasons can be provided.

Thirdly, and this emerges from the second point, we cannot claim to any kind of ultimate certainty. This includes the certainty of logicians, religious believers, and existentialists, among others. Because certainty is philosophically impossible and unjustifiable, although not psychologically impossible, it is plain that any belief which claims certainty is nothing more than entrenched dogma. For a number of reasons, astonishingly enough many of which are psychological and political, the elimination of dogma is desirable.

But we all need beliefs in order to live. Belief needs some basis. It is the immense responsibility of man to choose these bases well, in the light of historical inheritances and contemporary experience and insight. Instead of shallow and superstitious dogma forming this basis, we might employ what could be termed indexverisms,

to coin a word from the vocabulary of the Scholastics.
 (index = "guide"; verum = "truth") We need guides.
 Many which have been accepted on large scales have been
 extraordinarily bad, some have been good.

Fourthly, if the Sceptical arguments concerning
 the criterion are sound, then most traditional con-
 ceptions of the nature of philosophy are found to be
 entirely misdirected. Most philosophers in the past have
 thought themselves to be searching for knowledge, ultimate
 and incorruptible. But knowledge of the sort they claimed
 to be looking for I hold to be impossible, for reasons
 already pointed out, and for reasons which will appear
 later. If these reasons are good reasons, then philosophy
 ought not to be the search for "truth", but the search
 for what might gropingly be termed significance and
 meaningfulness, the striving for the amelioration of one's
 understanding and experience. I do not intend the remarks
 in the last sentence to be "true" or "false"; they are not
 claims or propositions which make a plea for acceptance
 or rejection on the basis of either confluence or collision
 with established "fact". They are not statements, but
 exhortations. They are exhortations to practice a form

of life which aims at the human penetration of the world of fact and experience, instead of its categorization, systematization and insipid description. These remarks would better be construed as an appeal, not an argument.

It follows from what is written above that we are not to look for philosophical positions which are "right" and eliminate those which are "wrong". We ought instead to look for, incorporate, and attempt to experience ourselves, the insights which each of the great philosophies has had, without submitting to their rigidities, dogmatic boundaries and historical constrictions. Every philosophy can give us something of value; every philosophy reveals or unveils something.

As Heidegger has tentatively pointed out³⁰ one must become "attuned" or "disposed" towards an idea or posture before one can understand it. If we are to understand more and more which is now alien to our understanding, we must dispense with more and more which now prevents us from gaining the disposition which we require if we are to understand that which we do not now understand. It is, I maintain, only through the cultivation of a sceptical

³⁰ Heidegger, M., Was ist das---die Philosophie?, trans. Wilde and Kluback, College & University Press, New Haven, 1956, Pp. 77.

consciousness, through acerbic doubt, through taking cognizance of the underlying lacunae in our conclusions, that we can get to the state-of-mind where we can begin to understand.

In doing philosophy, we must allow scepticism to be the instrument of our passion and desire. The discovery of the significance in a philosophy follows upon the exercise of scepticism and doubt in the region of our own belief and the corpus of our own ideas. We find this truth expressed in a piece of contemporary literature: "To discover the truth in anything that is alien, first dispense with the indispensable in your vision". (Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers) What would be the process or operation, and corresponding state-of-mind, through which this dispersal could occur?

#4. TROPE TWO: RELATIVITY

There was a group of ten different tropes formulated by Aenesidemus³¹, all of which added something slightly different to the general theme of relativism. Most deal with the more specific theme of perceptual relativity. In the interest of economy and clarity these tropes can be grouped together, and as a cluster can be said to form one trope. We shall call this trope the Trope of Relativity. The best way to go about dealing with it would be to state as briefly as possible the different arguments in favor of the general trope, and then go on to dismiss any which are thought to be insufficient, defective or irrelevant, after which a few general remarks can be made concerning the value of those arguments which stand the test of scrutiny.

A. The ten formulations of the Relativity Trope

³¹ Cf. Zeller, E., Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, Russell & Russell, New York, 1962, Pp. 298, and
Windleband, W., History of Ancient Philosophy, Dover, New York, 1956, Pp. 335.

can be nicely put into three sub-categories: that based on the subject which judges, that based on the object judged, and that based on both taken together. The first four of the ten modes are in the first category, the seventh and tenth are in the second, and the fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth are referred to the last category.

(i) The first argument* attempts to show that perceptual impressions vary according to the sort of animal which is having the impression, and therefore, owing to this contrariety of sense affection, no community of agreement can be attained as to what is the real nature of things which underlie impressions. Because of this relativity of impressions amongst animals, we cannot even go so far as to say that impressions of men are more reliable than are those of the so-called irrational animals. Generally, these impressions vary in animals due to their dissimilar morphologies and phylogeneses.

(ii) The second argument asserts that even if we can somehow know that man, as against every other animal, is worthy of credence, and that only his

* The formulation for all these arguments can be found in Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Book I.

impressions ought to judge reality, it is still impossible to know by means of a sense-perception what reality is like. The argument has it that along with the relativity of impressions in man, there is no standard or norm for judging which impressions are right and which are wrong.

Man is a conjoint of body and soul, according to the argument. As regards the body, we differ from one another as a result of our idiosygkrisiai ("constitutional peculiarities"). A racial difference, for instance, causes a variation in what could be termed 'personality-types', which in turn causes variation from, say, Occidental to Oriental in sense-impressions. The constitutional uniqueness of men's bodies is also exhibited in respect of attachment to, and avoidance of, external objects. For example, alcohol to one man is enjoyable, to another distasteful or toxic.

As regards the soul, roughly the same reasoning applies. The soul also has its preferences and aversions. These preferences and aversions depend upon pleasure and displeasure, resting in turn upon sensation and sense-impression, which the preceding argument has shown to be

relative to the individual.

Even though we can state the manner in which something appears to us, we cannot state what something is like in reality. We would have to believe the opinions of either all men or some men if we wish to know this reality. We cannot believe all men, because then we would have to admit to contradictory opinions, and we cannot believe some men, all of whom must agree, because we have no grounds for deciding which men to believe.

(iii) There are, as the third argument asserts, variations in the presentations of different senses. To the eye, a painting appears to have projections and recessions, while to the touch it appears flat. It is also the case that some things are pleasant to one sense but unpleasant to another. Empiricus, in observing many of these cases³² says that the differences in sense-receptivity lead us to suspend our judgement concerning the real nature of external objects which give rise to sensation in each of the five senses.

³² Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 97-98.

Which of the conflicting senses are we to use in making judgements about reality?

Furthermore, there is no way of being assured that objects do not have more qualities than those which we perceive. That is, our perceptual apparatus is perhaps comprised by an insufficient number of senses, and therefore it may be that our perceptual representations of objects are incomplete. An object "may possess other underlying qualities which affect other sense organs, though we, not being endowed with these organs, fail to perceive the sense-objects which come through them".³³ Thus, we cannot make any final claim to knowledge of those things which give rise to perception, because it can never be known whether we have adequately perceived them.

(iv) Judgement about external realities must be suspended because the subject, or perceptor, has, according to the fourth argument, varying perceptions of the same reality according to his condition or disposition,

³³ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., 92 - 94.

that is, his mental and physical state at the moment of perception. Empiricus lists many dispositions which, when they change to their opposite, cause our perceptions to change: sickness changes to health, waking to sleeping, soberness to drunkenness, grief to joy, and so on. This argument is based upon the observation of what Empiricus terms changes in "conditions" or "dispositions".

Disagreements between people, arising out of different impressions of the same object as a result of differences in disposition, admit of no settlement, for two reasons. First, whoever attempts to effect a settlement will be in a certain disposition (it would be absurd to suppose that he would have NO disposition) and if he is "to judge the sense impressions while he is in one disposition, he will be a party to the disagreement, and, moreover, he will not be an impartial judge of the external underlying objects owing to his being confused by the dispositions in which he is placed".³⁴ Second, whoever attempts to judge one impression more reliable

³⁴ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 113.

or truer than another must do so either without proof (uncritically) or with proof (critically). If the former, he is discredited, simply because he has no proof, and conviction is won only through proof in this sort of context. If the latter, he must judge impressions according to some criterion. The criterion to which he refers, however, must itself be known to be sound and true. If it is known to be sound and true, it must be known that there are reasons for its being so, and these reasons must be known. These reasons cannot themselves be derived from other impressions or sense-experiences, because it is the disparity of impressions which gives rise to the criticism. But, at the same time, what apart from impressions could show which ones are reliable and true.

In any case, by taking recourse to a new set of reasons in order to justify the criterion, we have become involved in an infinite regress. "Consequently, if a man can prefer one impression to another neither without a proof and a criterion nor with them, then the different impressions due to the differing condition

to state that we have found that the only way to get
(over) the / / is to have (over) the / / .
But, as it is (over) the / / , we have to have
the / / in the / / .

Others. It is the / / . It is the / / .
Others. It is the / / . It is the / / .
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will admit of no settlement; so that as a result of this mode we are brought to suspend judgement regarding the nature of external realities".³⁵

(v) The fifth argument asserts that it is evident that judgements about external realities ought to be suspended when we consider that our impressions vary according to our location in relationship to an object, according to the distance between the perceiver and the perceived, and according to the position which we assume relative to an object. A ship appears round, small and motionless when it is far away, but oblong, large and in motion when close. With regard to the location, we observe such things as the light of a lamp appearing dim in the sunlight and bright in the dark. Lastly, our position determines the angle at which we view an object, as when we walk around a coin and it appears to change shape as we view it from different perspectives. All objects are viewed from a certain position, at a certain distance and in a certain co-ordinated location. These conditions all produce great divergency in the way in which

³⁵ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 117

things appear to us, and the question is, which position relative to the object are we to assume in order to receive a true perceptual representation of it? There is no criterion for deciding. Thus, we are compelled by the fifth argument to withhold any claims to knowledge about those things which appear to us in perception.

(vi) The sixth argument acknowledges that there are impurities in perception: "The sixth mode is that based on admixtures by which we conclude that, because none of the real objects affects our senses by itself but always in conjunction with something else, though we may possibly be able to state the nature of the resultant mixture formed by the external object and that along with which it is perceived, we shall not be able to say what is the exact nature of the external reality in itself".³⁶

There are two ways in which the admixture occurs. First, the representation of an object must reach our senses through some medium, such as air, water, glass, et cetera, and in this sense the perception is impure

³⁶ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 124-125.

or mixed. Second, the perceptions are not apprehended directly by the mind, but through the senses which are its guides and which sometimes go wrong. And it is also probable that the "mind itself adds a certain admixture of its own to the messages received by the senses...".³⁷

(vii) The seventh argument is based on the "quantities and formations of the underlying objects". Many kinds of materials lose their original characteristics when they are re-arranged, or when their quantity is enlarged. Furthermore, some kinds of materials are sources of pleasure and assistance to the body, but they become displeasureable and dangerous if their quantity is increased. Food, drink and medicinals furnish obvious examples in support of this statement. Empiricus feels that a consideration of this mode will "probably" lead to a suspension of judgement "as we are unable to make any absolute statement concerning the real nature of external objects".³⁸

³⁷ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 128.

³⁸ *ibid*, I, 134-135.

(viii) The general principle of relativity is the basis for the eighth argument; it is by this principle that "we conclude that, since all things are relative, we shall suspend judgement concerning their independent and real existence".³⁹

The statement that all things are relative has a two-fold implication: with respect to the thing which judges, "it is in relation to some one particular animal or man or sense that each object appears, and, with respect to the concomitant percepts, each object appears in relation to some one particular admixture or mode or combination or quantity or position".⁴⁰

(ix) According to the ninth argument, our impressions and judgements of things change according to our degree of acquaintance with, or habituation to, these things, and, what is nearly the same, our impressions of something vary according to the frequency or rarity of the thing perceived. For instance, what we consider

³⁹ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 135.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, I, 136-137.

precious at one time becomes ordinary in larger amounts; if mountains were made of gold, gravel would be precious.

"Thus, although we shall be able perhaps to say what nature appears to belong to each of these things in virtue of its frequent or rare occurrence, we are not able to say what nature absolutely belongs to each of the external objects."⁴¹

(x) There is, finally, a tenth argument, which deals with Ethics, and which is expounded in order to demonstrate that moral beliefs are relative to cultural and geographic conditions. Empiricus reduces ethical belief to rules of conduct, habits, laws, legendary myths and dogmatic conceptions. Each of these categories can provide contrasting rules in different times and places, and Empiricus is prolix in his attempt to provide examples in support of this view.

⁴¹ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 144-145.

B. Of the ten arguments, eight deal specifically with the relativity of perception. These shall occupy our present interest. The tenth argument of this trope, the one dealing with ethical relativity, is beyond our interest, and no attention shall be accorded it here, although many of the questions which it raises are large and interesting. The eighth argument, which deals with the general principle of relativity, shall also go without consideration, because it is by and large unintelligible, trivial, infertile as a concept and to a great extent included in some of the others. To say that "all things are relative" is to pass on superfluous information. Even if a meaning can be fixed to this phrase, it will be found to be one which unsettles, or settles, nothing. If all things are relative, and if to be relative is to be relative to something else in a specific manner, then all things exist in a unique relation to something outside themselves. It is the specific relation that attracts our attention (for example, the relation between sense-data and sense-objects) and which provides fertile ground for analysis. Let us go on to evaluate and make relevant, wherever possible,

those arguments which remain.

The first argument does not isolate man as the organism who both makes and arbitrates knowledge claims, but such a conclusion immediately occurs to us. This conclusion is hardly important and unlikely to meet with any serious opposition: it has never been ascertained that any organism other than man has made knowledge claims, and assuming that such a thing could be ascertained as the case, it is certain that these claims could never be expressed to man in any manner of which we are presently aware. No considerations, therefore, will be directed towards this argument; it is philosophically insignificant.

What is more interesting is the next argument, which seems to make it logically impossible that within the class of men there is an element or member possessing a special status which permits him to repudiate or affirm the veracity of any given perception, or, what is even more interesting, which permits him to say exactly which manner of perception is sufficient for veridical impressions. We can use the simple formulation which

was expressed earlier (Pp. 41) to explicate the difficulty which this argument raises. Given two individuals, X and Y, and a perceivable object Z, it cannot be shown that both X and Y perceive Z, rather, it can only be reported by X how he perceives Z, the totality of his report being denoted as Z_0 , and by Y how he perceives Z, namely as Z_i . It cannot be shown either that Z is perceived as Z by both X and Y, or that Z_0 is a better (truer, more approximate, corresponding) perception than Z_i and vice versa. And it is not possible that another individual, W, can arbitrate any dispute, because he himself will be a party to it. He cannot show that his impression of the object Z, call it Z_n , is veridical, while the other two impressions, Z_0 and Z_i , are not. It can be reported by each of the three disputers what their impressions are like, but it cannot justifiably be claimed by any of them that they know what that which gives rise to the impression is like.

The argument makes a logical point, namely that all members of a given class, when they are necessarily confined to that class in some respects, and cannot release themselves from those confines (in this case,

the confine is that of the perceiving subject) cannot resolve conflicting claims which arise from within that class, when the resolution of the conflict demands a judgement made from grounds not arising from the class itself. That is to say, a perceiving subject, qua perceiving subject, cannot ever provide arbitration for the conflicting knowledge claims made by perceiving subjects, because the problem is that of the validity of perceptual cognitions of perceiving subjects. On account of this, i.e., that the argument raises a logical barrier, it can fairly be said that numbers cannot influence one's assesment of knowledge claims, or, ought not to in the least. Out of one hundred people, ninety-nine may call the color red, while only one might call it brown, yet even if such is the case, ultimate resolution of the conflicting reports is logically impossible. Even though it has long been recognized that numbers alone decide nothing in epistemological debate, the sceptical position expressed through this argument provides grounds for holding this.

It might be objected that the entire manner of our formulation for this argument presupposes its

conclusion. In saying that X perceives something as Z_0 while Y perceives it as Z_i , have we not already assumed the relativity of perception? But this is not the case, because if we were to write that both X and Y perceive Z as Z, we would be making a much larger and more unjustified assumption, to wit, that X and Y perceive in exactly the same way. The point is precisely that we do not know this, and not knowing this we can only write down what X reports and what Y reports. Having done this, however, it then becomes impossible to make the jump from $X:Z_0$ & $Y:Z_i$ to $X\&Y:Z$ (where ':' = 'perceives').

The argument suggests another difficulty. Suppose that X and Y report that they perceive Z and that there is a strict identity in their reports. X says that he sees yellow and so does Y, X smells acid and so does Y, and so on. To write down, in the analysis of this report, that $X\&Y:Z$ would beg the question, because the question is, "How do we know that what X calls yellow appears exactly the same to him as what Y calls yellow?". There is no way of knowing the answer to this, and so it must still be said that $X:Z_0$ and $Y:Z_i$, and both call it yellow.

The last two paragraphs require clarification. The process of clarification can be carried out by revealing the motive behind the arguments. It can easily be granted by anyone that X does not know if he suffers a pain in the same way that he knows that Y suffers pain. There is no way that X can experience Y's pain, or that Y can experience X's pain. Thus, it cannot be said by anyone that his experiential and perceptual life is, in every respect, capable of being compared with that of another person and, upon inspection, known to be either identical with it or different from it. It can fairly be said that it is simply by virtue of the FACT that this is so, that we can suppose the experiences of X to be the same as those of Y in the same way we suppose them to be different. It is just because someone can say "There are no grounds for assuming strict similarity in the experience of two different people" that someone else can say "There are no grounds for assuming differences either". Because the experience of another person is inaccessible to us, in any direct fashion but only through inference from behavior and so on, we can just as well assume that our

experiences are similar as that they are different.

But what we want to know is whether or not there are adequate grounds for making knowledge claims derived from perceptual experiences. It is precisely the sceptical point that we cannot; we must remain agnostic. Because the only attitude toward perceptual validity is that of agnosticism, the argument can continue to go on and assert that no knowledge claim can be substantiated from perception. This is all that the argument claims: it would indeed be odd for someone to assert that he knew that $X \& Y : Z$, instead of $X : Z_0$ & $Y : Z_1$, and when asked to explain how he knows such a thing replies either that he can't explain it, or provides a set of alleged justifications which are silly ("I just FEEL that way"; "Well, they both SAY they do"; "We all have the same senses, don't we?"), by virtue of the fact that he failed to understand the nature of the inquiry. He might also provide propositions which are not justifications at all ("It has to be that way, otherwise how could we ever agree on things"; "Life would be meaningless if we all lived in a private world").

Thus, because we do not know, and cannot with any

good reason suppose that we know that, say, X and Y both perceive yellow, each in exactly the same way and each in the way which corresponds with the external object, we must write down our formula in a way which states or makes obvious this ignorance: $X:Z_o$ & $Y:Z_i$. This formulation then is to be understood as an agnostic expression, a testimony to a lack of knowledge. It does not say $\text{not}(X\&Y:Z)$, in symbols $-(X\&Y:Z)$. This last formulation expresses something which is known, as an established fact, and we have no grounds for expressing it in such a fashion, for the same reason that we have no grounds for saying $X\&Y:Z$.

Empiricus makes another point which is well worth taking into account in considering questions about perception, viz, that there are what he calls idiosygkrisiai for each person, which to a greater or lesser degree determines the way we see and understand the world. To employ the standard metaphor, we all have our own peculiar spectacles through which the world is viewed. What were once called humours could now be called structural filters, which select and

modify what will reach our awareness through the mechanism of perception. The 'psychotic' person will conclude different things than the 'normal' person after both have spent some time perceiving the world. And how is it to be decided in which of these states-of-mind veridical perceptions are received? Again, numbers cannot decide: in addition to being mistaken with fair consistency, a majority of numbers is hardly a satisfactory reply, in itself, to a logical demand.

The number criterion, which I have criticized previously, is mentioned again only because a point must be underscored again. Too often numbers decide what is to be the case, and we allow this to happen more times than we are aware of its happening: numbers determine what mental health is, what we should die for, how to vote, how to dress, and so on. It is true, of course, that the consensus gentium is not the only criterion, but it is one of the worst ones, it is the most common one in ordinary life, and very often the only one which receives our consideration in everyday living.

The third argument in this trope makes a point

similar to that made in the second argument, and in addition makes a point which excites the imagination. The first point it makes is that different senses, instead of different men, together give rise to conflicting judgements concerning the real nature of something. But the argument lacks a power of conviction. If something looks sweet but tastes bitter, then it is irrelevant to ask whether it is really bitter or sweet. There are qualities of things which are appropriate to one sense but not to others. For example, the weight of something, although it might be suggested to be a certain mass by sight, is not determined to be that mass by sight; it is determined by touch, that is, by holding it. What is necessary, then, is to select the sense which is appropriate to the quality under dispute, and then use that sense to determine the rightness or wrongness of the suggestion made by other senses, which may conflict with the reports of the appropriate sense.

The problem in this argument arises when there is more than one sense involved in providing us with impressions or information about the external world, that is, more than one sense is necessary, and the reports of

each of these senses are in contrast with each other.

(We should remember that a large number of seeming conflicts have been accorded attention in the preceding paragraph; we are now dealing with those cases left over in which a genuine conflict can be observed).

That is, there are some cases in which a given quality of an object is putatively discoverable by two (or more) senses working in concert. Let us suppose that no matter what we do, the reports of those two or more senses are in conflict.

Here, it must be maintained that a sceptical argument has some force. If we find it impossible to isolate one sense appropriate to the disputed quality, and the conflict remains, then we do not know what to do. We do not know how to describe the information we receive; we do not wish to say that because the object before us always looks round and at the same time, whenever we feel it, it seems to be a block, on that account it is to be described as both round and square. We would, in an ordinary situation, be inclined to believe that there was something physically quite awry in either our tactile or visual apparatus. The impress-

ions provided to one or the other are not consistent with the impressions provided to one or the other.

We must hasten to deal with an observation which might be made here with the intention of undermining the whole sceptical attitude which the relativity trope is intended to reinforce, and it is that I can propose the dilemma about conflicting sense-data only on the basis of accepting it that the senses provide knowledge of the external world, otherwise why would it discomfit me when conflicts arise in sense-perception? I can question the validity of a sense-perception only because I know that there is something unreal or distorted about it, and I surely cannot know of a distortion unless I know of that of which it is the distortion. It will now be pointed out to me that this is inconsistent with the proposal that no knowledge is gained from perception, and this is what the chapter was, at the outset, designed to establish.

But the criticism loses its force when a simple distinction is made, and it is then recognized that the criticism is founded upon the misapplication of one word meaning, derived from that distinction, to a realm of

discourse for which only the other meaning is appropriate. The argument is running, now, on two levels. These levels can be distinguished according to two different senses of the word "know". These two senses come together in ordinary life and speech. This essay will have accomplished something even if it does nothing more than instill the conviction that they should not so come together.

In the course of experience, there emerge a number of fairly constant sense-impressions. When this constancy is thrown into disarray or imbalance, then we suspect that there is something wrong, and we see a neurologist, optometrist or psychiatrist. We would say of ourselves that we were no longer in touch with "reality"; we no longer "know" what is going on around us. It turns out, upon brief analysis, that we are using the phrase "no longer know" in the preceding sentence as a way of summing up all those experiential events which are inconsistent with past events. In ordinary life, to know something perceptually or empirically is to have a sense-experience, or a set of them, which is consistent with all the others we remember or can imagine. Thus when

I "know" the light to be green in ordinary experience, my assertion rests on the fact that in similar situations in the past there has been nothing strikingly different, and I have called it green then as well, as so has nearly everybody else.

But in the course of philosophizing, I bring under my gaze the entire set of perceptual experiences; it is not this or that sense-experience which I question or inspect, but sense-experience per se. It is now the logic of sense-experience which I am striving to intuit and verbalize, and when I ask whether or not there is knowledge won through sense-experience I must expect that I have a different sense of "knowledge" in mind. And it is true that I do. I have a more abstracted and theoretical sense in mind. It is clear that when it is said that "knowledge of the external world is impossible" there is contained in this an implication, namely, that the criterion upon which rests any claim to knowledge arising from ordinary perceptual experience does not exhibit the requirements which the philosopher demands. He asks if we can ever know that we know. In this ultimate sense of "know", we do not know anything through

sense-perception. The Sceptics had a number of reasons for holding to this proposition; I have been maintaining that the reason which the first argument of Aenesidemus' third trope purports to provide is not a good one. The digression accomplished, we can return to the original argument.

In judging a set of qualities to constitute a real object, we can always ask ourselves if we have enough information about the object being perceived. The second point of this third argument is that we can never know if we have perceived an object or state of affairs in its totality, instead of fragmentarily, because it cannot be established whether or not there are qualities resident in the object which go unperceived because we lack the necessary sense for perceiving them. We can endlessly attempt to imagine what these qualities would be like, but in vain, because our imagination will always be limited to synthesizing qualities presented to us through one or more of the senses which we now possess. However, it does not follow that because we cannot imagine another sense, or an entirely different sense-datum, these other senses and

sense-data do not exist outside our awareness. It may be true after all that there is another sense in the pineal gland, a "third eye of the mind" as some contend, which directly perceives God and personalities.⁴²

There is good cause to briefly arrest ourselves here, and consider a point which this perceptive argument evokes. In lingering on this consideration, I hope to exhibit a characteristic of the philosophical scepticism which the essay espouses.

It has been pointed out that there is a difference between saying that senses contradict each other but there is no way of resolving any conflicts, and that we never have assurance that all the qualities resident in the external world are made available to consciousness through the senses. It is alleged that the difference consists in the fact that the first observation should be used in support of a philosophical scepticism,

⁴² For a good popular, but scientifically respectable, account of research into this question, see Bleibtreu, John, LSD and the Third Eye, Atlantic Monthly, September, 1966, Pp. 64-69.

because it makes a logical point, while the second observation should be used as a foundation for a "scientific" scepticism, because it makes a point which is true as a matter of what we call fact.

I should like to take this fruitful distinction as a point of departure, and go on to argue that the first argument does make a logical point, but it makes a factual point as well, and therefore it can be employed to provide grounds for a philosophical scepticism concerning the knowability of the external world, and for a more practical methodological scepticism receiving its application within everyday empirical observations which are carried out on the assumption that the external world is empirically knowable.

The logical point in the argument from sense-deficiency is this: it does not matter how many senses we now possess, or come to possess, we can never know if we have enough senses to perceive every quality of something in the external world, because we require the sense that is perhaps lacking in order to be aware of the qualities which are appropriate to that sense. Unless we possess the missing sense, we can never be

aware of its absence. And if we come to possess another sense, of which we were not formerly aware, it can then be admitted that we have access to more data about the external world, but it cannot be admitted that we know ourselves to have all the data resident in the world. We can never know this. Insofar as this is true, it is also true that our limited awareness of the world has its scientific confinements. This is a proposition which intends to instill a practical scepticism into common sense and science. But the philosophical point is other than this; it says that it is logically impossible to ever know that we know the external world in its totality.

The fourth argument, now being considered, has much in its favor, from a logical point of view and also from a scientific empirical point of view. The literature of experimental psychology abounds with observations in support of the contention that moods, personality distortions and psychic conditions generally affect the way in which we perceive the world. We cannot as yet say that a change in personality, for instance, distorts perceptions, because we do not as yet know in

which psychic state perceptions of reality are to be found.

Two modern statements will suffice to bring into prominence the difficulty which is raised here. Russell, in The Conquest of Happiness⁴³, asserts that we ought to accept those perceptions and thoughts we have when we find ourselves in our most "vigorous" moments; by "vigorous" he means, among other things, well-rested, well nourished, and unintoxicated with drugs or alcohol. On the other hand there are those who assert that the truest perceptions of reality come in some kind of abnormal state, whether it be a psychotomimetic drug state, a state of religious delirium or a self-imposed hypnotic state.

How is this conflict to be resolved? Clearly, neither the person in the "normal" state or in the "abnormal" drug state can say because it is the validity of perceptual claims made by people in their

⁴³ Russell, B., The Conquest of Happiness, Unwin Books, London, 1965, Chapters 1, 1V.

respective states which are being questioned. There would have to be a third state which was neither "normal" nor "abnormal" (it is difficult to say what this would be), and this third state must be able to certify either the normal or the abnormal state as being the right one to be in for veridical perception. But this third state is not known to be any better than the original two, one of which it was to have certified. It needs to be certified itself, and clearly cannot be certified by one of the two which it was to have certified, for this would be circular reasoning. An infinite regress has just begun, according to the following logic.

Let us assume that all perceptions occur in either one of two states-of-mind or consciousness, and all perceptions can be classified according to the state in which they occur.

We shall designate the class of all perceptions in one state (we might call this the class of "normal" perceptions) as C_1 , and the class of all other perceptions as C_2 . The question is "In which class of perceptions are to be found those which are veridical?". This is the question which arises, for example, in a

debate between a mystic who claims to have perceived God and an abnormal-psychologist who claims that the mystic has a psychopathological disorder, and was mistaken when he ascribed an external reality to his alleged hallucinations. It is the same as a conflict between two people, one of which claims that reality is perceived only in a delirious condition and another who claims that reality is perceived only when, at least, the symptoms of delirium are all absent.

Suppose that it can be determined that perception X_1 resides in C_1 , while X_2 , which either contradicts or is inconsistent with X_1 , is correctly said to be in C_2 . Which is the veridical perception? In order to determine this we are logically forbidden from using another perception from C_1 to certify X_1 , or another perception from C_2 to certify X_2 , because owing to the fact that the other perception exhibits the same general characteristics as the one under question it too must be certified. If other perceptions are always used for the purpose of certification, then sooner or later the class will become exhausted, and the entire class will have to be put under question. The same thing happens with both classes.

Now we require a criterion by which either C_1 or C_2 can be known to be the state-of-consciousness within which veridical perception is achieved. Nothing from within each of these classes could be used to construct this criterion, because it is everything within the class which is being critically examined. Now the regress begins to appear.

We are discussing states-of-mind, and so far we have, minimally, concluded that if two different states-of-mind under dispute (C_1 & C_2) give rise to conflict, then we cannot ourselves be in either if we are to correctly decide which of them contains veridical perceptions. If we were, we could not trust ourselves to perceive anything correctly, because our perceptions would be in a class of questionable status.

It becomes clear that the criterion will have to be another state-of-mind, in all ways different from either C_1 or C_2 . Now one of two things can happen. Firstly, we will be unable to produce another state-of-mind which will certify the contents of either C_1 or C_2 . This will happen if the initial disjunction of consciousness into the two designated classes was com-

plete, i.e., every possible perception can be assigned membership in either C_1 or C_2 . In this event, there will be no way of justifying our claim that either X_1 or X_2 is veridical, because the criterion is lacking.

Secondly, another state-of-mind is found which may be used as a means of establishing whether it is C_1 or C_2 wherein veridical perceptions occur. But, again, the justification cannot be made, because we can always ask ourselves why C_3 is any more acceptable than C_1 or C_2 , and that, once asked, again demands another criterion. The process of justification will thereby be continued. Either the continuation will continue on ad infinitum, or there will be a forced termination of the process because nothing even suggests itself as a means of further justification.

The fact of most general significance made apparent by this argument is that it is logically impossible to state with finality what mental state one ought to be in to perceive veridically, and, because we are always one some mental state ourselves it must always be admitted by us that we cannot make any absolute and intractable knowledge claims.

There is a similar approach to the same cul-de-sac. Let us assume that we can catalogue all of the states-of-mind wherein (it is claimed) reality is known through perception. For simplicity, we can use only two, but the argument would have the same power if this were increased to three or more. Say that we can distinguish between these states, and then we go on to ask "In which of these states (say sleeping and waking) do we perceive reality?". We cannot use the data from within each of these states in any justificatory way, otherwise the question would go begging. For example, we cannot say of the perceptual representations of waking perception that they are more real because they appear in waking perception to be spatially and temporally continuous, by virtue of the fact that it is, among other things, spatial and temporal continuity which is being put under question. Similarly, the certainty which comes very often in dreams cannot be taken as evidence for any claim that the sleeping state is the one wherein reality is perceived. What we require is a criterion for veridical perception which is outside both states. But we are always either sleeping

or waking (or neither, namely dead). Therefore we can never know when we have know reality through perception.

This reasoning is roughly the same as that which Empiricus uses. There is a variety of dispositions among individuals, but because we are always in some disposition we can never say which is the desirable one without beggin the question.

The fifth argument is acceptable insofar as it prevents, when recognized as valid, a bad philosophical mistake. The mistake in question is supposing that there is an ideal empirical stance which must be assumed before reality can be perceived. By 'Empirical stance' I mean that we know something of the external world when we confine ourselves to a specific 'range of observation'. The correct range of observation, it might be alleged, for knowing the moon would be through a telescope, while that for knowing micro-organisms would be through a microscope. Now the range of observation can always be increased or decreased, given adequate technical equipment, but there is no criterion according to which we can judge exactly where on the

range we ought to put ourselves. Examples from ordinary life make the point more conspicuous. A ship on the horizon is different in appearance from a ship in the harbor when both are viewed from the shore. Which observational position has to be assumed before we can know the reality, that is, in which position does the perception exactly correspond to that which gives rise to it?

This is the first barb of a two-pronged argument: we do not know exactly what perspective to take relative to any given empirical object; because we must always be in some position of perspectivity as opposed to another, and because we can never know if it's the right perspective, we can never know whether or not the perception itself is veridical. This is an argument against perceptual claims in general, and its force consists in the logical point it makes. The criticism it contains does, I think, have some force against all perceptual claims, that is, it subverts to a degree the perceptual criterion for knowledge.

The other prong of the argument, though, makes a point of practical significance, namely, that we can never perceive an external reality in its entirety, and

thus cannot be said to have full knowledge of the external world through perception. Perception can never be anything other than fragmentary. If I look at the table from above, I do not see the bottom, if I look from the bottom I do not see the top. It is impossible to see it from every angle, in every light, and from every distance at once. We are always in a position relative to some part of the perceived object and often have to fill in the rest of the object ourselves, whether by conjecture or from the memory of previous perceptions. There is, however, no guarantee that the closure is either correct or complete. We can only report what appears to us, and perhaps in a group of reports from a number of individuals there might be a happy community of agreement, but this agreement, as I have tried to point out, is no guarantee of knowledge.

The sixth argument seems to be more powerful and annoying than the previous one. Assuming that I can determine and occupy the ideal position from which to observe something in the external world, I cannot, according to the sixth argument, be sure that I have a "pure" perception of it. This is so because the

perception of which I am aware has always come to my awareness through some medium or another. I can never perceive something except through some medium and nor can anyone else.* No one can tell me, nor me them, what an object in the world is really like.

Here we use 'medium' in its ordinary sense of something intermediate, something which mediates between two terms or things in a relation. Thus a perceptual medium would be that which mediates between the perceptual image in the mind and that which originally occasions the image. The dictionary sense of the word coincides with the sense I have in mind: "...intervening substance through which impressions are conveyed to the senses etc." (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, fourth edition) Now, I am arguing that every perception cannot be known to be veridical because it cannot be known to what extent it is changed by the medium through which it perceived.

The objection might be raised at this point that the argument runs into a paradox through playing on the

* 'Perceive', from the Latin per-cipere, capere, 'to take or seize through something', The Concise Oxford Dictionary, fourth edition, Oxford, 1959.

word "medium" to the extent that it becomes meaningless. The objection has it that we can say that we always perceive through a medium only because there happen to be cases of direct perception. A paradigm case of a mediated perception would be my viewing an event on television, that is, at a remove from the event itself, whereas a case of direct perception would be my actual attendance at the event itself. The alleged paradox arises when the word "medium" is employed in a sense with which we are not familiar, namely, when it is applied as well to those instances of perception ordinarily called direct.

However, the point of my argument is a wholly logical one, and because this is true, it can be expressed in simple logical terms. In the television example, there is an event, A, perceived by individual B, through a series of operations and objects which make up a television set, T. T is the medium, through which A is represented to B. Thus, if '---' means 'passes through... to', we represent the perceptual operation as A---T,B. 'T' here represents a series of events: the image goes to the camera from the object, through the camera to a

transmitter, through the transmitter, through air, through a receiver, through some tubes onto a screen, and then to the perceptual apparatus of B. My claim here is that every perceptual event can be represented in the same symbolism: A---x.y.z,C. If we remove the medium T, there will still be another medium, x, through which A must pass. It may have to pass through smoky air, or what is logically the same thing, clean air, but it nonetheless passes through something. One medium which is always present is the physical apparatus employed by C in a moment of perception. There may be a multiplicity of media, a case in point being the television example, however removing some of those media does not in the least alter the force of the logical point that as long as there is some medium (as there always is; all visual perceptions, for example, pass through a retina) through which we receive impressions, we do not know the real nature of A, by virtue of our not knowing whether or not the phenomenal idea we have of A corresponds with the reality of A, after it has been mediated in its passage to our awareness. Mediation occurs between the external world and our perceptual

"equipment", and between our sense-receptors and consciousness. The argument comes to this: our consciousness never comes into direct contact with reality through perception; all awareness of objects and events in the external world are mediated.

There is another point suggested by the argument. How do we know, in any event, how many intermediate terms there are in the passage from A to C? How would we know, if we all wore red spectacles all the time, that we were not seeing colors as they actually are? How would we be aware of a medium if it was there all the time, and if we could never realize its presence through not being able to sometimes notice its absence? Because we can never know that we have accounted for all media, we can never justifiably assert that our perceptions are veridical.

The seventh argument seems to be weak and unconvincing. It has little to do with the external world, rather, it points out how subjective states, such as that of pleasure, change as a result of the increase or decrease of the quantity of some given thing or group of things in the world. But subjective states have no residence in the objects which influence them, and so to talk

about the increase of something in the external world causing a change in subjective states is irrelevant to a discussion of our knowledge of the external world.

The ninth argument makes a penetrating psychological point, but in limiting ourselves to its exposition in the text we cannot see anything which has an explicit philosophical import. As a psychological observation, it is undoubtedly true that the degree of familiarity and adaptation we have towards a phenomenon has a direct bearing on the way we perceive it.

An obvious epistemological observation can be made here as well, which, although it is unquestionably valid when applied to some cases of perception, would not be so readily accepted when applied to all cases. I wish to suggest that there is no qualitative difference between the cases which immediately evoke immediate and unanimous assent and those which do not.

The observation in question is the one which says that although there are patterns and configurations in the external world which repeat themselves, some with frequency and some with unvarying regularity, there are nonetheless no grounds for asserting that those things which repeat themselves are more real than the unusual

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 - the second is the fact that the
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The first of these is the fact that the

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The twelfth is the fact that the

The thirteenth is the fact that the

The fourteenth is the fact that the

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The sixteenth is the fact that the

The seventeenth is the fact that the

The eighteenth is the fact that the

The nineteenth is the fact that the

or strange. This statement is a way of saying that the extent of temporal and spatial duration of a phenomenon is not a criterion for "reality". The epistemological correlate of this would be that the perceptual duration of a spatial-temporal object or event is likewise not a criterion for knowledge. In the same spirit as Hume's contention that what we call a cause is nothing more than a constant conjunction of two or more objects or events in space and time, we might also say that what we are wont to call the real world is nothing more than what we customarily and more or less constantly think ourselves to perceive. The point is that if we call into question the whole phenomenal basis for knowledge, then durational qualities of temporality and spatiality exhibited by something are irrelevant to any considerations about our knowledge of it.

We can accept any contention that frequency and rarity are irrelevant to any consideration about the real nature of anything in the world. Even though something has always appeared blue in the past, there are still no grounds for saying that we 1) know it to be blue or 2) it will appear blue again. The first part

of this disjunction calls into question empiricism as an epistemological theory, while the second part grants the validity of theory while pointing out something about the nature of the theory, namely its inductive and probabalistic basis.

The tenth argument has little to do with epistemology, as it deals with ethical relativity, which is interesting enough in itself, but beside our concerns here. Suffice to say that the argument is of value in that it leads to the recognition that much of our ethical action and belief is un-grounded and lacking in any rational justification, to which most philosophers are comitted. Therefore, if it is true that "habits, laws, legendary beliefs and dogmatic conceptions" provide most of the basis for ethical belief and conduct, then most philosophers should agree that many of our ethical professions and practices are bad things.

Some general considerations with philosophical significance emerge from reflection upon this trope. For one thing, it is in the nature of all perceptions that they are relative to some spatial-temporal circum-

stance. All perception is relative to the condition in which it occurs. Why is this an important observation? Before answering this question, let us see if it is possible to provide convincing reasons for accepting the observation as true.

It immediately strikes one that perception is an event or process which occurs within the world; a perception is part of the world. A perceptual event has the same logical qualities as any other event within the world: it is a relationship involving two or more entities. The object which is in the world may be called a representation, idea, sense-datum, or what one will, but it is nonetheless something which is separable from the continuing consciousness of the person who has it; it impinges or invades consciousness. Now, because perception is a relationship within the world there are immediate restrictions which surround it. These restrictions are of a temporal-spatial nature. A subject can experience only those objects resident in the surrounding environment. This is one sense in which all perceptions are relative, albeit the most trivial one: perceptions are part of the temporal-spatial order.

What is important about this? Firstly, there is no such thing as a sovereign perception; no perception possesses an absolute and final character. This means that we cannot perceive the totality of things, and therefore any assertion about the total or universal nature of things can only be a logical or abstract construction. No perception can claim to such a status. Secondly, epistemological difficulties aside, because perceptions are relative to the time-space environment in which they occur, any claims about the nature of the world can only be made and accepted on the ultimate basis of what some would call "faith", others a "probability measure". Any attempt to render a perception consistent with other past or anticipated experiences will require an ultimately unjustifiable belief that the future will resemble the past, that certain things remain phenomenally constant, and so on. If I wanted to remain sure that my desk can always be experienced, or will always appear, as a grey, four-legged, etc., thing in the world, I would have to continue to perceive it, and nothing else, for the rest of my life. If I did not do that, I could never be sure that the time-space correlates which were aligned with

the past perception of my desk would remain constant when I do not perceive it, because those correlates can only be experienced or perceived. Thus I cannot be sure that they can be perceived when I am not perceiving the desk, because in not perceiving the desk my experience and perception is involved in another relationship; my perception is relative to something else. Thirdly, because perception is relative to a temporal-spatial environment, and to a particular environment, there are some perceptions which can never occur, namely, perceptions of something which allegedly exists outside space and time. This means, for instance, that if empiricism is epistemologically valid, God can never be shown to exist. Empirical data for any "transcendent" being or state can never be collected, owing to the relative nature of perception, its necessary relativity to space and time. A corollary of this position is that if there are unperceivable realities, then empiricism is an inadequate epistemology.

But there are more specific observations to be made concerning the trope of relativity.

It seems that, given the fact of perceptual

relativity, the positing of what could be termed a "noumenal reality" underlying phenomenal representations would amount to nothing more than a philosophical superfluity. Why? In answering this question it must be remembered that the trope has to do with the perception we have of the external world; it argues against knowing something perceptually. In this context, we wish to arrive at the conclusion that the notion of a noumenal reality is something which is tacked on to our perceptual representations. And we wish to make the suggestion that the tacking on of this notion is done in an extremely misleading manner, such that when a serious attempt is made to try and understand the notion, we end up with a good specimen of unintelligibility.

If a number of people are looking at an object, they are each of them viewing it from a specific perspective, which none of the others enjoy, and under a number of specific psychological conditions. This, one might think, is just the fact which is supposed to lead to the conclusion that there is only one reality, being experienced in different ways. In mistakenly going to this conclusion, these people might say that there is a

"thing-in-itself" that goes unperceived, which in some sense "underlies" or "supports" the phenomenal representations, in much the same way that Locke's material substratum underlies or supports primary and secondary qualities. This description is one which employs a spatial image where it really can't be so employed. We can give no real sense to it.

If this were pointed out, namely, that the noumenal reality cannot literally underlie a nexus of perceptual representations (otherwise it, too, would be logically perceptible and therefore subject to the stringencies of perception), and further that there is no other sense we can give to this kind of spatial image except a literal one, then the rebuttal would likely take the form of: "A noumenal reality is a logical construct, a fabrication of consciousness". Exactly, but then the reality is not in the world. The noumenal reality now has little or nothing to do with our perceptions of the external world. They surely do not exist extra-mentally if they are logical constructs. They are forms of thought, tacked on to our percepts.

But they are allegedly connected in some sense with the reports we receive via the senses about the

external world. And if that is so, they are still unintelligible. We have achieved little by way of understanding in transplanting these ideal objects from the world to the subject's mind. Apart from the forms of space and time, what the mind imposes on, say, a pencil is a mystery.

I do not wish to become embroiled in important questions which are extraneous to the interest of this essay; suffice it to say that the Trope of Relativity, instead of leading to the positing of an "ideal object", ought to prevent such a thought from ever being entertained.

This conclusion implies that we are subject to severe limitations in our perception of the external world (and if it were shown that knowledge is gained through perception, the same would apply to knowledge). We are limited to the representations of the senses in gaining awareness of the external world, and the senses cannot be other than relative to some part or aspect of the external world. Because the relationship between the mind and perceptual objects or events is always relative, and because there is no other way of coming to awareness of the external world except through a perceptual event,

then it follows that our knowledge, or awareness, of the external world is always incomplete. We do not have awareness, in any stipulated or normal sense, of a "reality" behind the "appearance", in the Kantian or Lockean sense. What could possibly be meant in saying that behind the appearance is the real, when we have no notion of what the reality would be, by virtue of the fact that there is no way, logically, of approaching it? The relativity of perception makes it logically impossible.

The trope convinces us that we cannot go beyond perceptual awareness in making statements about the external world: this is what we are limited to, what we are relative to. From our perceptual representations and experiences, to be sure, inferences of a certain sort can be made, and we must of course admit the obvious, that there are good inferences and bad inferences. This being true, however, inferences remain only that---inferences.

Finally, the trope makes a correspondence theory of knowledge unmanageable. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is not stated, as an argument, in any of the Sceptical arguments against perception,

but because it is raised obliquely in these arguments, I shall state it briefly. If knowledge is correspondence between our idea or perception of something and that which excites the idea or perception, then we can never claim to know anything, because there is, as a simple matter of fact, no way of getting outside our minds in order to inspect the relationship between the perception and the corresponding object or event. But this is precisely what is required if the correspondence theory is to stand; the requirement cannot be met: we cannot make comparisons between perceptions and the world. The second reason follows directly from the argument of perceptual relativity. In attempting to correlate a perception with a thing in the external world, we would have to resort to another perception in order to see, at least, what the phenomenon was. But in doing this, we would be forced into a perceptual situation which was itself one of relativity. We would have to have, minimally, perceptual data, by which we could ascertain whether or not there was in fact a direct correspondence between thing and idea, or what the Gestalt psychologists have referred to as "psycho-

physical isomorphism".⁴⁴ This perceptual data would then be subject to exactly the same criticisms as the data which had originally been submitted for inspection, and the data it was supposed to support. And in addition, I do not see any manner of inspecting the other side of the correspondence relationship, namely the mental contents of the perceptor.

⁴⁴ Kohler, W., Gestalt Psychology, Mentor, New York, 1964, Pp. 39.

#5. TROPE THREE: REGRESSUS AD INFINITUM

The ten tropes of Aenesidemus, which we have gathered together under one rubric, have now been discussed. Now our attention will turn to the tropes of Agrippa, which number five. We shall deal with only two of these, however, as one of the others closely approximates the one just dealt with, relativity, another does not merit prolonged consideration, the one which he calls the trope from discrepancy, and a third one will be dealt with indirectly throughout the next two chapters.

The two remaining tropes of Agrippa are immensely important, and will accordingly receive lengthy treatment. The one now under consideration, the trope of infinite regress, attempts to show that all knowledge claims rest on unjustified assumptions or presuppositions. It comes into direct opposition with Aristotle's philosophy of demonstrative science, and therefore with much later philosophizing.

Aristotle saw that argument requires a starting point. He called the starting point for demonstrative argument "primary and indemonstrable". If the premisses

for an argument are not primary and indemonstrable, "they will require demonstration in order to be known, since to have knowledge, if it be not accidental knowledge, of things which are demonstrable, means precisely to have a demonstration of them. The premisses must be the causes of the conclusion, better known than it, and prior to it...".⁴⁵

The Sceptics simply denied that such primary and indemonstrable premisses could be found: "The Mode based on regress ad infinitum is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on ad infinitum, so that the consequence is suspension, as we possess no starting point for our argument."⁴⁶

The trope asserts two things. First, it asserts that there can in effect be no knowledge of anything

⁴⁵ Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 71^b, 26-30, transl. G.R.G. Mure in The Basic Works of Aristotle, Random House, New York, 1941.

⁴⁶ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 166-167

because there is no starting point which is incorrigible and certain from which we can make deductions leading to further knowledge. There are no praecognita, therefore anything which is thought to be knowledge is either itself an unjustified assumption, or derived therefrom. Second, even though we might know something, any attempt to prove that we know something will end in failure due to the fact that a proof, once begun, can never finish. Every proof itself requires proof. Another way to put this is to say that every premiss in a given argument is a conclusion in another argument, and this conclusion is in its turn derived from other premisses which were themselves conclusions in another argument.

Thus, it is claimed that 1) we can never know anything, and 2) even if we claim to know something, that claim cannot be proven true.

The history of Philosophy provides us with a terminology which permits us to make an operational distinction between sorts of knowledge claims. Using this terminology in an expanded sense, we might distinguish knowledge claims as either analytic--a-priori,

or synthetic--a-posteriori. I say in an expanded sense, because under analytic--a-priori knowledge claims I wish to include tautologies, identity-relationships, logical and mathematical axioms, and even most definitions. A synthetic--a-posteriori proposition, on the other hand, would be by and large any empirical proposition, any scientific proposition, any expression of alleged "fact".

Propositions of the second category are obviously of the sort requiring justification; an empirical assertion requires empirical verification. We go beyond this to demand justification, as well, for any empirical proposition irrelevant of its content; that is, we want to know what the epistemological justifications are for empirical propositions as types of statements. We demand empirical verification for empirical statements and non-empirical verification for empiricism.

Propositions of the first category also require justification. It will readily be accepted that one must justify, say, the deriviation of a contradiction from a set of premisses for the purposes of proving something through reductio ad absurdam. These

justifications, however, will themselves be part of the axiomatic system in which the reductio proof is used. But it would not be so readily accepted that the axioms themselves must be justified, and are therefore exempt from criticism from the standpoint of the infinite regress. It is commonly supposed that the axioms of a logical or mathematical system are, as the axioms of Euclid were once thought to be, absolutely and undubitably true. They do not require justification because they are self-evidently true, and no demonstration can be provided for them because they are so obviously true. What could be more obviously true, for example, than the Euclidean axiom that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line? At least, what could have been more true until Reimann dropped the axiom, claiming that more than one straight line connects two points.

Philosophical debate concerning the foundations of mathematics has disclosed a variety of perspectives concerning the justifications for axioms in systems of logic or mathematics. This fact ought to make us suspicious at once that Sceptical questions are as

corrosive in the first category as in the second category listed above. And so they are. The infinite regress is as destructive to an analytic--a-priori proposition as it is to a synthetic--a-posteriori one.

The regress is generated from all KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS. Something is asserted or claimed. Then, "How do you know?" is sufficient to begin the regress. And the regress criticism cannot be evaded through the adoption of some sort of constructivist position which says, in effect, that one does not know whether or not the axioms of logic are either a) stating something, or b) true or false, but it shall be decreed that they do both, through the exercise of some inscrutable power of fiat and stipulation. Unless the philosopher is willing to permit all sorts of utterly silly (and incomprehensible) axiomatic stipulations to be made, what would amount to, in fact, an intellectually unrespectable anarchy in mathematics and logic, he must give some justification for the type of foundation he chooses for his system. And once a justification is given, the sceptical question "Why?" arises, and a regress can commence. (For an enlightening discussion concerning

scepticism and the foundations of mathematics, Cf. Lakatos, I., "The Foundations of Mathematics", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1962, Pp. 155-184)

Therefore, we accept it that the regress extends its influence to all knowledge claims or propositions asserting an alleged truth, whether analytic or synthetic, a priori or a posteriori. Before going on to show the nature of an infinite regress and how it is effective, one point requires our preliminary consideration.

There is a certain kind of synthetic statement which is unaffected by the infinite regress argument. I can report to you what sense-data are objects of awareness for me at any given time, and I can have utter certainty that I am experiencing them. To my assertion that I am in pain, you cannot sensibly demand reasons of me for asserting that I am in pain. To merely report a subjective mental state, then, is not to submit to the criticism of this trope.

However, something important emerges from this observation, namely, that whenever I make an inference from a personal experience to the real nature of the

external world, I can immediately be asked for a justification for doing so. I can claim to be aware of what I am experiencing, and that would be the end of the matter, but when I claim to know something about the external world, then that is not the end of the matter. It is here that the infinite regress argument brings itself to bear. I will either go on indefinitely providing reasons for my making judgements about the world, or I will terminate the regress by making a statement about a personal experience, exempt from the argument of infinite regression. But then this would be uninteresting for anyone else, except insofar as I report something about myself which may have something fascinating about it; it would certainly not be a knowledge claim.

I do not wish to repudiate this argument; I believe that in its simplest terms, it is logically valid. As soon as an inference is made from a personal experience to a knowledge claim about external reality the chain of infinite regression can be forged, and once invoked, the charge becomes theoretically un-answerable. However, there is a fairly obvious observation to be made,

and when it is made, we feel we want to overlook the logic of the argument, no matter how much deference we wish to pay it at an abstract conceptual level.

The observation is this: we all commonly suppose, in everyday life, that we see, hear, etc., roughly the same things in roughly the same way, and we can agree on what is seen, heard, and so on. The argument has forced us to the conclusion that we can only communicate reports, or draw pictures, or act out what we have perceived of the external world. These reports, pictures, actions, and so on, are not theoretically justifiable knowledge claims about the external world. And yet we very often agree in the reports we share of our respective experiences.

A community of agreement is often achieved in personal reports from many different people. If this was not so, there would be no point in, say, traffic lights or in public performances of structured music. If individuals were to exhibit complete and utter anarchy in their reports of what they had perceived, it would not even be possible to call one half of the earth night and the other half day.

The logical point that we can never claim to

know objectively that the light is red does not bother us; there is for the most part a unanimity in the reports we make of what we are experiencing. X reports an experience of redness, so does Y, and so on. I do not know how it is possible that this agreement occurs. The consensus gentium perhaps indicates, or gives us reinforcing grounds for asserting, that we all have knowledge of the external world, however it does not prove it: we cannot, as I have said before, make any statements concerning fact simply because there is a large number of people who believe the alleged fact to be true.

Let us consider at least one ramification of each of two possibilities: either the regress objection is valid against claims of knowledge about the external world, or the objection is not valid.

If the objection is valid, we are still left wondering about the fact raised above, namely, that there exists a community of agreement in the reports of people. The objection, we remember, was a logical one (if X experiences Y, any attempt to prove that Y and something in the world are isomorphic will lead to an infinite regress) and therefore, if it is logically valid, there

is no logical manner of showing why this agreement exists. The reason for this is that in pointing out the fact of agreement we are attempting to fortify the counter-claim that nearly all individuals DO have knowledge of the external world. But the claim against which this observation was directed we have assumed to be logically established, and nothing can be logically true and false at the same time. If it is the case that no logic presents itself by which we can draw the inference from numbers to what is the case, clearly the explanation will have to be of a type other than logical. The most likely explanation type would seem to be a psychological one, or at least an empirical one, which would show how social groups come to agree upon a name which is common to a group of experiences each of which may be different from all the others that are called by the same name. That is, it would have to be pointed out what the mechanism is whereby we can make the jump from

- 1) Nobody knows if their sense-experiences correspond to objects and events in the external world, or even that their experiences resemble those of everyone else, to
- 2) Everyone says roughly the same things about what they

sense. The explanation for this jump would have to be, I think, a scientific one and not a conceptual one or a logical one. For this reason, it should not be demanded of a philosopher to provide such an explanation.

This is one implication of the alleged validity of the regress objection, although there are others. Let us explore one implication of the alleged invalidity of the objection. The question I wish to ask in this respect is "How is it possible that the objection is invalid?".

It seems that the objection could be invalid only if it were said that there is a sense of "knowledge" which is far different from the ordinary sense we have had in mind throughout the discussion so far, which can be stated: X has "knowledge" of the external world if and only if X believes Y to be the case, X provides reasons for saying that Y is the case, and Y is the case. If "knowledge" is used in this sense in the statement "Knowledge of the external world is possible", then the regress objection is fatal. This is the sense we have in mind in our everyday life nearly all the time. There must be another more technical and esoteric sense in which the word "knowledge" is used, which is unaffected by the

regress argument, because in the normal sense, formalized above, knowledge is impossible. Thus, for the regress objection to be weightless, we would have to be confronted with a different analysis of the word "know". What is immediately suspicious, however, is that this analysis would have to obliterate the subject-object duality of knower and the known. It seems to me that if the knower-known distinction were eliminated, then we would be stranded with a sense of "knowledge" which is so far removed from the common understanding and the common usage that there would necessarily have to be a host of other words, employed along with the single instance of changed meaning, that would also be so stretched that they too would be forced to give up their original meanings. Either that, or there there would have to be an intended or unintended play on ambiguity and multiple meaning.

It does not seem questionable that the traditional and familiar distinction between that which knows and that which is known would be dissolved if we were provided with an analysis of the word "knowledge" against which the regress argument had no force. Because I do not see

how such a distinction can be overcome, logically, I must continue to accept the analysis which nearly everyone, including most philosophers in their most philosophic moments, give to the word "knowledge".

The two proposed considerations, then, have led us to the following broad conclusions: 1) If the regress argument is effective in countering knowledge claims about the external world, then the philosopher's work is over in that area, and a scientific explanation is required for the consensus gentium, and 2) if the regress argument is not effective against knowledge claims about the external world, it is because a sense of "knowledge" is used with which we are for the most part unfamiliar and unwilling to accept. From this, it follows that the argument to infinite regress can be held to be effective in criticizing any claims to knowledge of the external world. This is what the Sceptics of antiquity maintained, and only this. Theirs was strictly a logical position within epistemological dispute. But this essay will further attempt to bring to relevance the regressus trope in all philosophical exercise.

There is clearly a difference in the following two statements: a) All arguments invoke infinite regresses

b) If an argument invokes an infinite regress, or if one can be invoked against it, then it is invalid.

I have claimed that a) expresses the Sceptical trope, and further that it is valid if modified to read "All knowledge claims invoke infinite regresses". The validity of the trope, however, is often ignored because it has little to do with our everyday experience. But from the position of statement a) we get the concept of an infinite regress, a concept which is certainly valuable in some ways. My task now is to point out this value, as expressed in b).

The regress argument can be used as a critical tool in philosophy. It was used to great advantage, for example, in the Parmenides against Plato's theory of forms, as stated by Socrates in that dialogue, and with some modifications it can be used as an effective general argument against any dualistic ontology where Being is rigorously divided into two disparate categories. What needs to be shown is just how an infinite regress argument is effective. If this can be shown, then the

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Sceptics have done later philosophy a great service.

An infinite regress is a sequence of propositions with no terminus, where each proposition in the sequence necessarily implies another. The statement that to cover a distance, one must first cover half the distance invokes an infinite regress, because half a distance is itself a distance, and to cover this distance, call it distance², one must first cover half of it, call it distance³, and so on indefinitely.

There are at least two sorts of infinite regresses, which may be called on the one hand self-generating and on the other hand, instigated. Both kinds are useful in philosophical argument. A philosopher may point out that a statement or argument has an inherent regress in it, and by doing so he may, in circumstances which will presently be made clear, render the statement or argument in question invalid. Or he may point out that in order to meet certain stringent requirements which may be logical, ontological or epistemological in nature, an infinite regress is unavoidable, and thereby he destroys the statement or argument in question. In the first case, he prevents the statement or argument from ever being

formulated intelligibly, and in the second he makes it necessary for the statement of argument to be either modified to avoid the infinite regress or to be supplanted by another statement or argument.

An example of a self-generating regress would be "All numbers have a successor which is also a number". If all numbers have a successor, then a successor, itself a number, will have a successor, and that in turn will have a successor, and so on. The above statement generates the familiar infinite regression of number, which makes it possible to write $1, 2, 3, \dots \infty$. The regress invokes itself with the statement's verbalization.

An example of an instigated regress can be found in Plato's Parmenides, formalized by Gregory Vlastos⁴⁷ as follows:

- 1) If any set of things are F, there exists a unique Form, F-ness, in virtue of which each of them are F.
- 1a) a, b, c are F.

From (1) (a fair enough statement of one of the

⁴⁷ Cf. Vlastos, G., "The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides", in Studies in Plato's Metaphysics, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1965, Pp. 261-262.

cardinal tenets of Plato's ontology) and (1a) it follows that

1b) F-ness exists.

Now Parmenides goes on (132a6-11) to assert that

2) If a, b, c and F-ness are F, there exists a second Form, F-ness₁, in virtue of which a, b, c and F-ness are F.

But the antecedent of this hypothetical does not follow from anything said above. (1), (1a) and (1b) do not entail that F-ness is F. To derive this we need a new assumption.

SPA*) The Form in virtue of which a set of things have a character itself has that character.

From this, given (1), it follows that

3) F-ness is F.

From (3) and (1a) we can now derive the antecedent of (2),

2a) a, b, c and F-ness are F.

Even so, the consequent of (2) does not follow: what is there to keep F-ness itself from being the Form in virtue of which a, b, c and F-ness are F? To exclude this possibility we need another assumption,

NIA*) The Form in virtue of which a set of things have a certain character is not identical with any of them.

Given this, (1) and (2a), we can now infer the consequent

* Self-predicating assumption.

* Non-identity assumption.

of (2),

2b) A second Form, $F\text{-ness}_1$, exists, in virtue of which a , b , c and $F\text{-ness}$ are F .

The existence of a third Form, $F\text{-ness}_2$, and so on ad infinitum would then follow by iteration of the reasoning.

These two examples cover all infinite regresses. Either the regress arises independently from a statement or argument, or, if certain requirements are to be met by the statement or argument, then a regress can be instigated against it. We might say that the first kind of regress arises without the application of philosophical positions or "pressure", while the second kind will not appear until some sort of "pressure" is applied. In the example from Plato above, the pressure is applied when it is stated that there must be something uniting the Form and its embodiments. Then the regress is forced into the open.

However, it is necessary to classify these two kinds of regress even further, as it has been pointed out, by A.E. Taylor for example⁴⁸, that many regresses, either

⁴⁸, Cf. Taylor, A.E., "Parmenides, Zeno and Socrates", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1915-16, Pp. 234-289.

self-generating or instigated, do not harm in any way a statement or an argument. This, surely, is a point requiring an answer. What is it that makes some regress arguments devastating against some positions, while against others they are of no consequence?

The Third Man Argument in Plato's Parmenides I believe to be fatal to the Platonic ontology not because it involves a regress, but because it involves a VICIOUS regress; it is a model of argumentation to an infinite vicious regress. What is so destructive about a vicious regress? The fact is that there are many theoretical positions which one may plausibly assume, even though they involve regresses, but somehow or other we fail to be bothered by this fact. Consider the following case which arises from the trope now being discussed.

It was a common argument among the Sceptics that knowledge is impossible because every belief is a conclusion drawn from a set of premisses, and these premisses in turn are conclusions drawn from other sets of premisses, and these premisses are in turn conclusions, and so on to infinity. There is no first and ultimate premiss. That is, when asked for justification for any

proclamation of knowledge or belief we cannot ultimately give it, because the process of justification is an infinite one, therefore theoretically impossible. Now this would bother us immensely if our concern was to answer the question "Is knowledge possible?", where "knowledge" is understood to be, say, ultimately justified belief. When the question is proposed at this level the regress argument would be fatal: knowledge, if it is to be ultimately justified, is impossible.

But the regress argument would bother us only at this level; at another more practical level it might not be any embarrassment at all. For instance, you might ask me what follows from a set of premisses, and I can derive a conclusion for you. This is all you wanted to know; I have isolated a sequence in an infinite series (here the series is premiss, conclusion, premiss..._n) for the purpose of deriving some proposition or another. Then you do not immediately turn to me and say "But what good is this; it is only a part of an infinitely regressing series!". The fact that there is an infinite regression to syllogistic does not in the least concern you, or the logician who works out proofs every day.

There is another case of the same sort which was

raised above. Given the two statements,

S_1 : Every effect has a cause, and every cause is itself caused, and

S_2 : To know an event one must know all its causes,

it can be seen that there is a difference between them of the kind exhibited by the first case. The first statement informs us that when we observe an event, there is a corresponding cause which is its co-relative. S_1 leaves us free to stop and start wherever we wish in the cause-effect series; if we wish, we can go back and look for the cause of a cause, and the cause of that cause, and so on indefinitely, but we need not do so. That the cause-effect series is as infinite one does not in the least concern the aetiologist. The second statement, S_2 , is problematic; it tells us that we can never assert that we know an event, because the moment we attempt to gain knowledge about an event, we have, according to the conditions laid down by S_2 , invited an infinitely long task. It is when a statement like S_2 becomes the focus of our concern that we have on our hands a regress which is called vicious. In order to maintain a systematic terminology, we can simply term the other sort of regress, the unburdensome and

unworrysome regress, an innocuous regress.

What distinguishes the vicious from the innocuous regress? The answer is to be found through analysis of the purposes and ends for which a statement or argument that generates or invites a regress is made. The catastrophic consequences of a regress are not made clear by scrutinizing the regress alone; the consequences, on the contrary, dismay us when we discover them only we have asked certain kinds of questions or after we have proposed certain kinds of propositions.

It must be admitted that it is exceedingly difficult to say off-hand just what these "certain kinds" would be. The viciousness of a regress depends entirely on the context in which the regress arises. We must look at specific cases of regressing series and then, on the basis of what we observe, say either "Yes, this regress makes certain things impossible which we wish were possible", or "This is an infinite regress, but so what?". We would likely make the first reply to the introduction of a regress from the statement S_2 on Pp. 136, and the second reply to the statement S_1 . I think we can usually feel the weight (or viciousness) of a regress following from a statement or argument.

Obviously, if Plato had created two worlds, ontologically disparate, then Parmenides' Third Man Arguments annihilate the dualism. The mechanics of the annihilation might be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1) Plato posits two worlds, the world of Formal Ideas or Essences and the world of sense-objects which are somehow derivative of the Ideas.
- 2) When faced with the problem of relating the two worlds he posits a relationship of "participation" between them. Sensible things "participate" in the Forms.
- 3) There are many individual derivatives from each Form.
- 4) The criticism commences here. Individuals x, y, z have something in common, G-ness, by virtue of their participation in a Form, G.
- 5) The Form, G, and the things which have G-ness must also have something in common, say G_1 .
- 6) The Form G, things which have G-ness in common, and G_1 must all have something in common, say G_2 . Now an infinite regress has been generated. This is so because if G_1 guarantees community between things which have G-ness in common and the Form G then there must be something else, G_2 , which guarantees this community. Then that guarantee must be guaranteed, and so on, ad infinitum.

Another example points up the distinction. If every number has a successor, then an infinite regression

proceeds out of any point in the number system. There is nothing pessimistic about this until the claim is made that to know the value of a number we must know the value of its successor. An absurd claim, to be sure, but one which nonetheless is subject to the criticism made by the regress trope. To know the value of seventeen, I must first know the value of eighteen, but to know the value of eighteen, I must first know the value of nineteen. Clearly I do not know the value of any number, given that the series of numbers is endless.

The context of argument and discussion, then, determines the potency of the regress criticism. Perhaps it would suffice to say that a vicious regress is one which must be completed, but can't be, while an innocuous regress is one which while it cannot be completed, need not be.

Thus, to point out in a philosophical discussion that a certain statement or argument entails or contains a vicious regress is to render that statement or argument untenable. Usually, citing an infinite regress as either inherent in, or entailed by, a position is to point out that the position makes certain presuppositions, but

these presuppositions have no terminal point. The presuppositions themselves presuppose something, and the series of presuppositions are all of them what could be termed the same form, or "logical type".

Here, in part, lies the value to philosophy which the Sceptics imparted. By making use of the regress trope, that which we consider to be something known turns out to be really something assumed. By asking the right questions we can expose the underlying dogmatic conceptions in much philosophizing. Also, by making the right demands upon an argument, we can show that very often what passes as "justified belief" must be overthrown by the logic of this trope, because the belief has no foundation or justification at all.

#6. TROPE FOUR: CIRCULUS IN PROBANDO

We have already passed over two of the tropes of Agrippa---that of Relativity, because it merely repeats the arguments of Aenesidemus, and that of Discord, because it lacks significance---and we shall do the same thing with one more of the five tropes, called the trope from Hypothesis. After some remarks on this trope, we can pass on immediately to another philosophically interesting trope, which Agrippa called circulus in probando.

The trope to which we shall now give only the briefest attention is the trope from hypothesis. It is really nothing more than the reply to the infinite regress argument: against the contention by the Sceptics that every statement or argument requires an infinity of other statements or arguments in order to be justified, the Dogmatists rejoined that the infinite process of justification could be terminated by making assumptions or hypotheses. That is, they believed that the starting point for argument could be a hypothesis: "We have the Mode based on hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being

forced to recede ad infinitum, take as their starting point something which they cannot establish by argument but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration."⁴⁹ But one cannot start with a hypothesis "simply and without demonstration" because it is not known which hypotheses are acceptable and which are not. Given any summption, it is possible that anyone may choose another which contradicts it, or which is simply a silly assumption. Indeed, this is sometimes the case.

Now to pass on to the last of the tropes of Agrippa. There is little from ancient text to go on in the formulation of this argument, therefore we shall have to take the small amount said there and from it construct a tool for philosophical criticism, thereby again making the Sceptical arguments of antiquity relevant to modern concerns and methods in philosophy. The circulus in probando has at other times been called circulus in demonstrando, but both amount to the same thing; the first says 'circular proof' while the second

⁴⁹ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 168-169.

There is much to be said for the view that the
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 principle of equality of resources. It is a principle
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says 'circular demonstration'. We shall employ the first formula.

In its most unexpanded terms, the *circulus* argument says that an alleged proof presupposes what it wants to prove; the circulus in probando arises when that which is presumed to be a proof needs to be sustained by what is to be proven. We have already made apparent one such circle (p. 45): if S is used to prove I, and I is used to prove S, and I is the only thing that can prove S, and S is the only thing that can prove I, then the alleged proof is burdened with the charge of circular reasoning.

"The Mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation from the matter; in this case being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgement on both."⁵⁰ This informs us of a simple fallacy in logic, circular reasoning.

It was discovered that with regard to the regress

⁵⁰ Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, op. cit., I, 169-170

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argument there were two sorts of regressions, one vicious and the other innocuous. With regard to circularity, a similar distinction suggests itself, and it again in terms of what is required of an argument that we will decide whether or not the circularity in that argument is harmful.

The circularity in an argument will be vicious if, at least, that argument or set of propositions is proposed as a proof of something or other. That is, nothing is proven at all in a proposed proof which exhibits circularity. What I am really trying to do at present is point out that there is a difference between a formal logical fallacy---circulus in probando---and something else which is non-logical in character, referred to in every-day life as a "vicious circle". What we ordinarily call a vicious circle has nothing to do with logic, it is, if anything, more a psychological phenomenon, or, if not that, then a paradigm of frustration, sometimes referred to as a "double-bind". We could formalize the everyday situation in the following way: A implies or leads to B, B implies or leads to C, C implies or leads to A, A implies B...., whereas the formalization of the fallacy of circular

reasoning would be: A is used or required to prove or support the supposed truth of B, and B is used or required to prove or support the supposed truth of A. It is to the credit of the Sceptics that even if they were not the first to notice this fallacy, they were nonetheless the first to state it explicitly as an error in logical procedure.

As we shall see, the trope is a good tool for criticism as it stands, and it also suggests another general tool which philosophers can employ in their critical reasonings. However, before this is discussed, it would be interesting to see if this trope can be put into a formulation which would cover all epistemological claims and, on a point of logic, render them invalid by reason of an inherent circularity.

Every claim to knowledge, let us assume, can be put into a truth-functional statement, i.e., one that is either true or false. We stipulate that if this cannot be done then no knowledge claims are made. We shall exclude those statements which are neither true nor false from our present discussion. Let T designate the class of all true statements, and let F designate

the class of all false ones. T and F will each be either finite or infinite. Assume for the moment that they are both finite. Now, we ask, into which class are we to put any knowledge claim, S_1 , which is to ask the question "Is the knowledge claim S_1 true or false?". Assume that S_1 is in T. The assumption is shown to be a correct assumption only if there is another statement, S_2 , which is known to be in T which can "certify" it. But if it is known that S_2 is in T, there must have been another statement, S_3 , which established this. Neither S_2 nor S_3 could be in F, because a false statement does not prove the truth of another statement, unless by simple contradiction. But it is known that not- S_1 only if it is known that S_1 , which is precisely what is being questioned. To show that S_1 is in T, then, we would have to go to S_2 , then S_3 , and so on right up to S_n , which will exhaust the whole class, because T is by assumption finite. S_n will be the only statement which can prove S_1 , because all the others have been exhausted. But in employing S_n to prove S_1 we have come full circle: what will prove S_n ? S_1 must be proven before S_n can be proven, but S_n must be proven before S_1 can be proven. Any attempt

to prove a knowledge claim true would on this basis be one of circularity.

Assume that S_1 is in F. If this is so, there will have to be another statement which falsifies it, and this statement could be in either T or F. It does not matter which: as soon as one is located somewhere, we still have to ask "How do we know the falsifying statement belongs there?". Once having demanded this, the circle has started and all that is left is the filling in of the circumference until the circle is complete.

If the attempt were made to locate S_1 in F by saying that it is known that it is true that not- S_1 , the immediate charge is one of question begging. If not- S_1 is the simple negation or contradiction of S_1 , we would not know that not- S_1 is in T unless we already knew that S_1 is in F. A proposition is known to be true as soon as it is known that its contradiction is false, and conversely. Thus we could not argue that S_1 is in F because not- S_1 is in T, because in order to know that not- S_1 is in T we have to previously know that S_1 is in F. The proposition which is adduced to establish the falsity of S_1 would have to be of a type other than

simple negation, that is, of the type S_2 or not- S_2 . The same circle has now begun.

Assume that T and F are both infinite. Then clearly nothing would be known to be in either class, because the series of statements would be endless; then there would be no circularity, but an infinite regress.

We have distinguished between vicious circularity and innocuous circularity. A third distinction now suggests itself, which will allow somewhat the extension of this trope in our philosophizing. One may reason badly in either committing mistakes of a purely formal nature, for example in asserting P and not-P, or one may reason badly by making mistakes which although they do not show up on a truth-table are just as reprehensible. Both of these kinds of bad reasoning appear in circular arguments; the first kind we could call "formal circularity" and the second kind we could call "domestic circularity".

The characterizing feature of formal circularity is the necessity of having the conclusion proved before the argument or reasoning can begin. Nothing would ever get off the ground unless what is to be proved is

[illegible]

already known to be, or assumed to be proved. To point out such a fallacy is to invalidate the argument in which it occurs. It is to leave the argument invalid until new premisses not entailed by those which constitute the circle are introduced.

If, for example, there were only two modes of cognition, that of sense-perception and that of logical reasoning, then the previously mentioned objection will prevent any conclusions from being drawn about the "valid" way of cognizing reality. In order to validate either one of these modes we could not, in carrying out this attempted validation, go beyond the data of sense and the data of reason. These being the only modes of cognition, we would necessarily be restricted to only them. But we would at the same time be able to use neither of them. If we isolate one of the two modes of cognition for validation, then we would have to use the other as a means of validation. Assume that the first mode isolated was sense-perception. We could not use sense-perception to validate sense-perception as a mode of cognition, because it is sense-perception which is being questioned, and anything which is doubted of sense-perception initially can also be doubted when it

is adduced as evidence in favor of or against the contention that sense-perception is a valid mode of cognition. The evidence would have to be something other than that which we presume to gather from sense-perception. The only other place that this evidence could come from would of course be what was called logical reasoning. If sense-perception is to receive validation, and sense-perception cannot validate itself, and if there are only two ways of knowing, then if we want to know how knowledge is gained, we must conduct our inquiry through the operations of thought alone. Sense-perception must be validated by reason.

We began by wondering, in a state of total ignorance, what the "valid" mode of cognition was, and this meant making both assumed modes subjects of doubt. Therefore, having decided that sense-perception could not be used to validate sense-perception, we cannot go on to employ reasons as the means by which we shall effect the validation, because reason, too, is still a matter of suspicion. If reason is to validate sense-perception, it must itself be certified because we do not as yet know whether or not reason is so faulty that

its conclusions are consistently imperfect or wrong.

Reason, as with sense-perception, cannot judge itself. Allowing reason to be its own counsel and censor would be a gross mistake. Now as there are, it was assumed, only two modes of cognition, and because reason is to be validated by something other than itself, it follows that reason is to be validated by the operations of sense-perception. If such an attempt is made, the fallacy of circular reasoning is immediately apparent: Sense-perception is to validate reason, but reason must first validate sense-perception. Thus, if anyone wished to validate sense-perception, that is, draw the conclusion that sense-perception was the "valid" mode of cognition, he would be committing a formal fallacy, insofar as he would require the conclusion before he could ever begin his argument. The same circumstances surround any attempt to validate pure reason as a mode of cognizing.

One objection to this argument is obvious: the distinction between sense and reason (or naive empiricism and naive rationalism) is primitive and unintelligible. The separation of consciousness, or cognitive structure, into these two categories must merely be repudiated, and

the charge of formal circularity could never arise. But there are two things, at least, which can be rejoined. Firstly, even though the distinction is primitive it is still held by a large number of thinkers who philosophize badly, especially in religious matters. Their recognition of this distinction is explicit. Among others, who philosophize in a different way, there is often an underlying implicit use of the distinction. Insofar as this is the case, the difficulty must be pointed out. Secondly, even if there is someone who does not accept or use the distinction, he will still be inclined to make a distinction of the same type for logical or epistemological reasons. If, on the other hand, no distinction is made at all, and it is claimed that there is in any event only one way of cognition, then the circulus in probando trope can be employed to show that there is no way to validate the reports or conclusions of that cognitive structure, because all the cognitive data would be of exactly the same type as that which is the subject of evaluation and scrutiny. Each bit of cognitive data would have to presuppose the truth of every other bit. No validation is possible because the question would always be begged.

We shall hypothesize for the moment that a three-fold distinction is made, or a four-fold one, or whatever. The circularity will still arise. It might be said that "intuition" is a third mode of cognizing. In trying to demonstrate that this is true, we could not claim to know intuitively that intuition is the avenue of knowledge, because our wonder is directed at intuition itself. We would have to know it another way. If we assert that we know it by reason alone, and the operations and conclusions of reason have a questionable status, as in fact they do, then reason requires validation. But neither reason nor intuition could perform the validation; all that is left is sense-perception, and the only way in which we could validate perception would be through intuition, given the conclusiveness of the previous argument. Thus, if we wanted to know that intuition was the best or the valid way of cognizing, we would have to know that intuition was the best way of cognizing.

There is nothing terribly novel in the last few pages; circular reasoning has been recognized as fallacious for a goodly time (although not many people are prepared to look for the circularity in their own reasonings).

There is something suggested by the trope as the Sceptics stated it, however, which I believe is quite important and which has not yet been brought to light, to my knowledge.

This is what we have already termed a domestic fallacy. In this fallacy, there are no mistakes of a formal nature committed, rather it is a kind of bad philosophizing which creates errors that are of a more subtle and insidious kind; they generally pass by unnoticed and in doing so give rise to grievous conclusions. When a person commits this fallacy, we might say that he "has in mind" the conclusion before he ever reaches it. He does not require the conclusion in the same sense in which the formal fallacy requires it, rather he borrows from it, or assumes it in part. The fallacy often appears in philosophical argument: the use of examples, analogy, metaphor, and what often passes off as philosophical "explanation", frequently exhibit it.

The notion of domestic circularity is hard to make clear. The person who proposes an argument which contains a domestic fallacy has presupposed the conclusion in one way or another; when the argument is said and done we find that the premisses give rise to a conclusion, but the conclusion could equally give rise to the

premisses. There is a traditional argument which I think makes clear what I mean by domestic fallacy. The argument is the one which purports to prove the existence of God from the design which we observe in the universe. The teleological argument as stated by Aquinas⁵⁰ is stereotypic of all arguments from design. He maintains that we can infer the existence of a designer from the design, a purposeful super-agent from the observation of the things in the world exhibiting purpose. There are many ways to quarrel with this weak argument, but we must pass them over, and confine the discussion to pointing out where the fallacy lies.

I am now claiming that the fallacy in the teleological argument is as follows: to say that there is a design apparent in the world is already to have made the assumption that there is a designer. It is impossible to understand the concept of design unless one at the same time understands the concept of an agent of design, namely, a designer.

If I am sitting on a beach, and a strange-looking

⁵⁰ Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Question II, Article 3, reply to Objection ii.

object is washed up on the shore which exhibits many characteristics of a piece of human art, my suspicions would likely be aroused. Suppose that upon close investigation, I find that it in every way resembles Whistler's mother. The face depicted on the object is clearly a human one; the mole is on the cheek, the eyes are the same color, the same tooth is missing. Under these unusual circumstances I would look as closely as possible, but suppose that even after exhausting all my doubts about this object I can do nothing other than conclude that it was created by human intelligence and human hands. Here, I have made an inference from the object before me back to a human artificer. But I could do this only because of one thing: I previously knew what human beings were capable of in their art. I knew already what sorts of things they have produced and what sorts of things they were likely to produce, given their technological tools, their intelligence-development, and so on. I already knew that objects similar to the one before me now have had a certain kind of creation---human creation. If this previous knowledge had never been made available to me, if I had never bathed in a human culture and seen humans producing the sorts of things

they generally produce, it would never have struck me to make the inference that I did make. If I were an extra-mundane creature, such a thought would never have entered my mind. The only thing I could have done would have been to hypothesize and define some creature, unknown to me, which may have been responsible for the creation of this picture, and then go on to try and deduce something about that creature from the artifact which I have alleged him to have produced. It would be exceedingly hard for me to do this if I did not have SOME acquaintance with SOME kind of being who produced something.

In any event, I could not infer the existence of an artist from the object I discover unless I was in a position of some prior awareness, and that awareness would have to be about art and about artists. Now, in approaching the teleological argument, the first observation to be made is that we lack, completely, the kind of knowledge which is required to infer a designer from what we see around us. We do not know what sorts of activities this designer, if he exists at all, would engage in, we have never seen any of his work, and therefore we do not know if the world around us is an example of

his work. Lacking this knowledge, we must first hypothesize a super-natural architect or designer, and then go on to try and discover something of his nature from what we believed him have designed. Thus, the teleological argument, which is intended to prove the existence of a super-natural being, proves nothing; it must pre-suppose exactly what is to be proved.

A recognition of the flaw, rather, a flaw, in the design argument leads to a recognition of the flaws which inhere in many kinds of statements which come up in philosophical discussion. We might label this flaw generally as "question-begging". The design argument begs the question of a designer. Question-begging is circular; if you make a statement and I ask for supporting evidence, and you provide more statements each of which presupposes the truth of the original statement, then you have begged the question.

We can see how this circularity is exhibited by an analogy. It must be recalled at this point that the trope with which we are presently dealing is called circulus in probando, circular proof. To be sure, an analogy has its own immense values insofar as it can

illuminate what a person means, and insofar as it can show the nature of a relationship between two or more things or terms, or a number of other things. But its inherent defect lies in its amenability to being used as an argument or proof. When it is used in this way, and very often it is used unwittingly in this way, it must be recognized that such a use is illegitimate. If you give me an argument, or if you make an observation to me, and if I go on to demand a justification or proof for the argument or observation in question, then an analogy won't do. It would be misleading to give me one, unless I had asked something like "What do you mean by that argument?" or "I can't quite see what you are getting at".

In giving me an analogy instead of a proof, you would be committing a domestic fallacy of circularity. The circularity consists in the fact that the analogy presupposes an understanding of the original argument or observation. Unless that were understood, the co-relational analogy would not be understood either. The one borrows from the other; if both the argument and the analogy did not do this, then nothing would be illuminated by the analogy. It is just because the

argument and its analogy are co-related, or parallel, that the analogy is of any use in leading us to a deeper understanding of the argument. What I am pointing out is that the fallacy consists in using the analogy as if it were another argument in support of the original argument. It is due to the fact that it is presupposed by the original argument that such an operation cannot be legitimately performed.

One example should suffice here. Suppose it is said that the behavioral and experiential symptoms of delirium tremens are analogous to the symptoms of hebephrenic schizophrenia. If someone came to a psychiatrist and said "What is it like to be schizoid?", the psychiatrist could say to him "If you have ever been intoxicated to the point of delirium, then you have experienced somewhat the same thing.". Here, the psychiatrist has given the patient some understanding of a psychopathological state through applying an analogy. And in doing this he has not been misleading. However, if he had said something like "The hebephrenic and delirious states are exactly the same", and then tried to establish this by pointing out all the similar symptoms, he would be

misleading. He cannot prove that they are the same thing merely by pointing out facts which can, at best, be said to be analogous. We can describe these facts as nothing other than analogous, if we remain sceptical. In listing the behavioral facts common to both states, and claiming them to establish the contention that the states are identical, is to presuppose the identity of the states in question. The proof of their identity would have to be on grounds other than what might be no more than a coincidence of behavioral data. The coincidence facilitates an understanding of one state in terms of another, but it does not establish their identity.

In sum then, there are two categories which embrace all circular arguments. The first is the category of formal circularity, where the conclusion of the argument is required for the formulation of the premisses, and it logically depends on them, and those premisses, once formulated, lead to the same conclusion which gave rise to them. The second is the category of domestic circularity, where the conclusion is implicitly imbedded in the premisses. Metaphorical arguments,

analogical arguments are always in this category, and quite often philosophical examples and explanations are found to reside there as well.

#7. A CONCLUDING REMARK

We have by no means exhausted the wealth of arguments discoverable in the work of Empiricus. We have not, for example, dealt with Aenesidemus' eight arguments against aetiology, nor have we outlined the ethical position of the Sceptics, which relativizes moral values. I have said nothing about Empiricus' treatises on Physics, Mathematics, Grammar and Music, each of which contains arguments that could easily be formulated into tropes of interest to philosophers of language, logic and epistemology.

I have limited myself to the construction of four tropes which merit consideration by anyone who philosophizes. The stated purpose of these tropes, namely mental quietude, has been ignored, and other ends have been substituted in accordance with which the tropes achieve value. The other ends, as we hinted in the first chapter, would be at least two: the prevention of philosophical error, and the removal of error. A trope which acts in the capacity of a preventative we called a prophylactic, while a trope which is antidotal we called an abortifacient. We can see that, depending on the context of discussion and

argument, each of the four tropes outlined could just as easily be one or the other. The criterion trope, for example could just as easily prevent a position from being formulated as it could render that position invalid or defective after its formulation.

In philosophizing, we can remember these tropes and use them in scrutinizing the development and the conclusion of any argument. We could remember the circulus trope, for example, and thereby bring to light the suppositions which underlie an argument.

A slightly different perspective on the tropes emerges from a slightly different classification of them. We could view them either as tools to be employed in our reasonings, or as general arguments which restrict our aspirations to certain sorts of belief and knowledge.

The regressus trope, to use another example, could either be influential in refuting a position, in which case it would be deployed as a tool (this is the way Parmenides used it), or it could be influential in preventing certain philosophical desires from arising, such as the desire for a completely presuppositionless philosophy. In the first case it is important as an

instrument of our methodology, in the second place it is important as a censor upon our philosophical desire.

We wish now to provide a very short assessment of Scepticism, and hopefully show wherein its values lie. It is the distressing case, however, that among laymen and philosophers alike there exists a profound misunderstanding of the nature of Sceptical thought and the sceptical state-of-mind. In popular usage, to which many philosophers unhappily fall prey for bad reasons, scepticism is a term of scorn, and is most often used in a pejorative manner. Scepticism is thought to be unhealthy---sometimes to a pathological extent---a merely destructive and negativistic. This, however, is not the case. In order to show this, it would be best to state the meaning of Scepticism in terms which are closer to those employed by some of the great Sceptics themselves. The procedure will be one of categorization, after the fashion of Empiricus.

We find in the opening passages of the Outlines of Pyrrhonism a classification of Sceptics into three types. Each has its own obvious merits. One kind of Scepticism is that which is called, according to Empiricus, "Zetetic". A Zetetic is so called because his activity

is that of continuous investigation and inquiry. His questions never come to an end; by this two things could be meant, namely, that when a question is formulated and proposed the Zetetic will never entertain the notion that the answer that is subsequently supplied to it is a final answer or a complete answer, and also that there could be no such thing as a thoroughly complete question or a thoroughly exhaustive list of questions. There will always be something more to fathom.

Zeteticism is possible, to my mind, only because there is another kind of Scepticism, which Empiricus has labelled "Ephectic". An Ephectic Scepticism is one which advocates a 'suspensive' state-of-mind, wherein assent is withheld from exhortations to belief or assertions of knowledge. Thus, it should be seen that a Zetetic Scepticism is possible only on the prior basis of an Ephectic philosophy. A questioning state-of-mind is the natural result of a suspensive state-of-mind.

However, we can suspend our judgement concerning knowledge claims only because we are capable of doubt. We must experience the insecurity of doubt before we can

achieve the state-of-mind common to the Ephectic and Zetetic. The doubting creature is the "Aporetic" Sceptic, which is the third rubric employed by Empiricus in his classificatory scheme.

Thus, a Sceptic, in Empiricus' language, is one who investigates, suspends judgement and doubts. The first two activities are the natural result of, and depend on, the last activity of doubting. Doubt, then, is the quiddity of Scepticism as Empiricus has schematized it. We wish to generalize upon the concept of doubt as a state-of-mind or a form of consciousness.

The heresy of doubt must receive more exhortation. It is the first condition for progress in every kind of intellectual endeavour. Its immense value ought to be obvious to everyone, but to the despair of those who have had the fortune or misfortune of falling in love with philosophy, as Husserl puts it⁵¹, this is not so.

It is doubt, incisive and brutal, which initiates

⁵¹ Husserl, E., Ideas; a General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, transl. W.R. Gibson, Collier Books, New York, 1962, Pp. 21.

every movement towards new knowledge and away from old misconceptions, superstitions, myths, social and intellectual dogma, and simple mistakes. It is doubt that hopefully reduces and eliminates the tyranny of Bacon's Four Idols, which constrict, distort and de-humanize the minds of men. And it is doubt which liberates and mobilizes the being of man, opening it up to superior understanding and cognizance.

All things we hold to be irrefragable, sacred, perfect and "acceptable" must come within the penetrating gaze of doubt, the purifier of the intellect.

It is through the mechanism of doubt working in the service of the Aporetic consciousness that the elimination of error is won, and there is a clearing away of some of the rubbish that lies in the way of awareness and understanding.

Doubt must be the scientist's and philosopher's modus vivendi. Its practical value, however, extends far beyond their domains: its psychological value, although largely unrecognized, is present. We find one psychological writer explaining at length the value of scepticism to mental hygiene and social stability; he goes so far as to assert that scepticism is one criterion

for maturity and psychological well-being: "By this (scepticism) is meant the mental habit of doubt, of questioning, and the corresponding refusal to accept anything on the basis of faith or authority.

If one factor can be held accountable for the evident stress of contemporary society, it is the creeping paralysis that has overtaken us subsequent to our loss of the capacity for doubt...Resistance to tyranny, whether over the body or the mind, originates in the question, in the expression of doubt".⁵²

We find similar statements interspersed throughout the work of philosophers, some of the more impassioned of which can be found in the writings of Russell, Unamuno, and Santayana.

This, then, is the most general value which emerges from the Scepticism of antiquity: the recognition and development of the dubative consciousness. The more specifically philosophical values have hopefully been made apparent in the preceding pages.

⁵² Lindner, Robert., "Education for Maturity", contained in Must You Conform?, Evergreen Books, New York, 1956, Pp. 199.

APPENDIX

A number of references to dates, places, persons and doctrines appear in the first chapter (INTRODUCTION: Historical Outlines) which invite the citation of some recognized author or text, in order to receive substantiation. Many of these citations I have consciously overlooked because, as I have stated, the introduction was not intended to be either complete or scholarly. The professed aim of the chapter was to provide the groundwork for a very general understanding of the Sceptical posture, and the tone of Greek Sceptical thought, and, in so doing, provide a point of departure and context for the chapters which followed.

The books upon which I relied most heavily for the material presented in the first chapter were as follows:

1. Patrick, M.M., The Greek Sceptics, cf. Bibliography.
2. Zeller, E., Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, cf. Bibliography.
3. _____, Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy, cf. Bibliography.
4. Windleband, W., A History of Ancient Philosophy, cf. Bibliography.

Since the writing of this thesis I have discovered a book, formerly unavailable to me, through which most of the material of the first chapter finds agreement. It is:

5. Brochard, V., Les Sceptiques Grecs, Paris, 1923.

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